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ABSTRACT

This report describes and analyzes the situation of nonformal learning in Spain. Chapter 1 describes the Spanish context by looking at qualification as the point of departure; recent changes in the industrial fabric of Spain and the birth of a new social and institutional view of qualification; the reform of vocational education and training; informal learning in Spain; and the status of work experience in the social debate. Chapter 2 describes and analyzes the schemes and initiatives set up to identify, recognize, and establish the role played by nonformal learning in the social process of constructing qualifications. Five areas in which nonformal learning is recognized and assessed are addressed: the role played by nonformal learning in public employment policies; the status given to nonformal learning by the education authorities, provisions for access to the formal education system, and the scope for recognition of nonformal qualifications; the new national system of qualifications and the creation of the national institute for qualifications; certificates of occupational proficiency; and recognition of nonformal learning within the field of collective bargaining. Chapter 3 considers the direction in which recognition of work-based learning will move, including certificates of occupational proficiency and vocational titles. Chapter 4 draws conclusions. (Appendixes contain a 96-item bibliography and a list of abbreviations.) (YLB)

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Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Spain

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a part of the CEDEFOP project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning' initiated in 1997. In the three years since the start of the project, studies covering a majority of Member States of the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA) have been conducted (Luxembourg and Iceland have not been covered so far). A synthesis report summing up and analysing the results from these reports, 'The changing institutional and political role of non-formal learning: European tendencies' (CEDEFOP 2000), has been produced. The objectives of this project are:

- To identify to what degree methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning have been introduced in the respective countries.
- To identify how methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning are integrated into and supported by existing institutions and systems.
- To analyse the political context surrounding the introduction of methodologies and systems in this area.

The current report on Spain is a contribution to this project. Building on information from a broad selection of informants from both public and private sectors, the report gives a detailed picture of ongoing work in this area. Since 1990, three important legal and political initiatives have been taken in Spain. A law on 'the general regulation of the education system, was introduced by the Ministry of Education in 1990, and two inter-linked national vocational training programmes' (I and II), were introduced by the Ministry of Labour in 1993 and 1997. The purpose of these initiatives is to link together and integrate the different sub-systems of training and different forms of acquisition of competences (i.e. combine 'regulated, occupational, continuing training and work experience' with each other). This bridging effort is clearly based on an output-oriented, competence-based view of vocational training education. The report gives a comprehensive overview of these developments as well as reactions from the different players in Spanish society towards them.

In many respects, the developments in Spain can be compared to those taking place in other parts of the Mediterranean. Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece are facing some of the same challenges in the area of identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning. These countries (or at least certain regions of these countries), have a much weaker tradition of vocational education and training than is the case in most of northern Europe. Only recently, over the last decade or so, have initiatives been taken to remedy this. The relative weakness of the formal vocational education and training system has established non-formal learning (in particular through work experience), as the domineering form of (vocational) competence reproduction and renewal. This means, and is probably of specific importance in Greece, the southern regions of Italy, and the less developed areas of Spain and Portugal, that a vast reservoir of non-formal, experienced-based competences exists. If this reservoir is going to be 'tapped,' and if it is going to be

renewed (quantitatively and qualitatively), it is necessary to identify and assess its strengths and weaknesses. The quality of competences based on non-formal learning cannot and should not be taken for granted. Proper systems for identification and assessment could be one way to face this quality problem. Perhaps more than is the case in northern Europe, this illustrates the need for identification and assessment of non-formal learning. Although building on relatively weak traditions in the field of vocational education and training, and facing a deep-rooted underrating of vocational competences in general, and non-formal vocational competences in particular, a growing willingness towards change can be observed. Throughout the last decade, all four countries have been reforming their vocational education and training systems and outlined ways of linking formal and non-formal learning. As illustrated in the report, Spain can be looked upon as a front-runner in this area having introduced far-reaching reforms. The translation of these reforms into practical measures is of course something challenging. The coming years will show how this transformation process, from reform documents to actual practices will proceed.

The focus on non-formal learning reflects what we can characterise as a broader approach to learning. Learning, vocational and otherwise, should not be looked upon as something exclusively limited to formal settings. Formal education and training cannot be substituted by non-formal learning, it can however be supplemented. Developing methodologies and systems for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning should be looked upon as ways of realising such supplementation. In this respect, the Spanish outlook appears promising and open to future development in this field.

Thessaloniki, February 2000

Stavrou Stavros
Deputy Director

Jens Bjørnåvold
Project manager

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1. THE SPANISH CONTEXT

1.1. Introduction

The importance of the identification and recognition of different forms of learning and the knowledge and skills acquired through work experience, or outside the job in daily life, is becoming an issue which will have an impact on the future of our society. One illustration of this at Community level is the work undertaken by CEDEFOP, on the homogeneity and transparency of vocational qualifications in the European Union, or the processes which have taken place in some countries (France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany) leading to the introduction of methodologies and systems for the identification and recognition of non-formal learning,[1] i.e. learning which takes place outside formal and recognised training systems: learning at the workplace, in non-industrial bodies such as NGOs, in the family, during leisure hours or free time, etc. [2]

With the aim of presenting a coherent picture of the European Union as a whole, this report will describe and analyse the situation of informal learning in Spain.

In a context characterized to a great extent by reorganization processes of the production system, extremely high unemployment levels and rises in educational levels of the young population, Spain has implemented plans to reform the labour market and the education system, in particular the vocational training system, by tackling the urgent necessity for new qualifications. The two national vocational training programmes, approved by respective governments and drawn up with the participation, in both cases, of the social partners, deal with the construction, contents and methodologies of vocational training. These programmes recognise, with greater or lesser detail, the need to establish an integrated vocational training system encompassing the subsystems (regulated, occupational and continuing training) of vocational training and work experience.

When the two programmes were being developed, one vital aspect was the contents of qualification, the aim being first to define precisely, concepts such as classification, professionality, categories, etc. and secondly, the 'new' contents associated with them: technical competence and social skills (participation and involvement, responsibility, patterns of behaviour, etc.) and the recognition of training as the stimulus for the improvement and modification of qualifications.

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[1] With regard to the use in this report of the terms 'non-formal' and 'informal' it would be useful to refer to the 'glossary' of the project presented in the coordination meeting on 1 September 1998 in Brussels by Philippe Tissot and Jens Bjørnåvold. We may explain that 'non-formal' especially refers to knowledge and skills not officially recognised through accreditation or a title. 'Informal' is a broader term covering all knowledge and skills which a persons possesses, thus also including 'non-formal' learning.
In this report, for more coherence and to facilitate editing, we have not been particularly rigorous, leaving the exact understanding of the argument to the context.

[2] Some initiatives are running in parallel to this one; the recognition of non-formal qualification is being tackled in other European Union programmes. We have started with the work of identification and contacts to unite all efforts. *The accreditation of experience: from education to the occupation* by the Centre for research on adult education of the University of Barcelona is worth mentioning.

1.2. Qualification, the point of departure

To determine 'vocational qualification' the enterprise and workers have to be situated in their productive and organizational context. The term 'vocational qualification', in most recent work sociology, refers to the work capacity, both individual and collective, of the workers. It refers to their 'know-how' and the way in which they exploit it in the production of goods and services. In a specific productive context, 'vocational qualification' is the relationship between the aggregate of knowledge and skills and the work capacity of each worker and the work actually done in the company. Work researchers, both from university and trade unions and employers' associations, are consistently devoting more effort and resources to this question. We are analysing training, individual and collective skills, the knowledge and use of machines and tools required for the occupation, the task assigned within the work process, work and control systems and procedures established by the company, in other words, all the aspects found in every concrete work situation.

Traditionally, qualification was identified as the level of instruction, of studies, acquired at 'school', in the officially recognised system of education. However, today, everyone agrees it is something much more complex. Academic training is certainly important but, obviously, it is not the only factor which plays a role in the construction of qualification. The work that we perform and the way in which it is organized, our relations with our colleagues, the collective know-how of the trade, the experience we gain in our place of work, social competence, character, are some of the factors which make up 'vocational qualification' (Vocational Training No 2, 1991).

The concept of 'social competence' is used to explain social and professional behaviour at the workplace and daily life: experience, difficulties, capacity of relating to others, submitting to company authority and control. This aspect is becoming increasingly important in corporate life in Spain. As a businessman from the electronics sector said a few years ago: '*what we are looking for, more than a qualification, is a willing person keen to work...*' (Castillo et al. 1996).

'Vocational qualification' is thus the result of the work capacity of each worker, the knowledge of the 'trade'. This is understood as the sum total of individual and collective skills and knowledge of the use of tools and machines required for the occupation (know-how) which the worker has assimilated in the course of his life and work. It is exercised and executed as the assigned task within the work process, the product of a specific work organization.

This definition of 'vocational qualification' shows that the 'social elements produced both within and outside the company' are becoming increasingly important (Castillo and Santos, 1993, p. 53).

The qualification, which embodies different forms of learning, knowing and acting, can only be perceived within the context and as the outcome of a specific division of labour; its development depends on how it is distributed, how this knowledge is shared (division) between persons, workers, machines and institutions in each society.

Our position, in line with the best research and with an awareness of the social networks pervading the new reality of production, is situated in the centre of society. Let us start with the realization that qualification is a concept which is socially constructed. In other words, institutions, history and tradition, labour relations, training systems or the type of family, have a vital influence on the production of the knowledge and skills applied in work. From this angle, i.e. the social construction of qualifications, we take qualification to be a social relationship in the first instance. This implies recognition of qualification as an object of negotiation between social actors and not only as an objective entity which is derived from the quality of work.

1.3. Recent changes in the industrial fabric of Spain and the birth of a new social and institutional view of qualification

In Spain, as all over the world, the industrial fabric has been subject to a reorganization of production processes in the past 20 years, along with or as a consequence of technological innovation processes and organizational changes, which have transformed its productive structure. The most visible aspects may be put in simplified terms as the internal 'downsizing' of large companies and the emergence and growth of small enterprises. Features which characterize this reorganization process are: (a) real-time production; (b) 'organizational' decentralization and dispersion in the territory, 'network company', functions outsourced, subcontracting, the establishment of enterprises offering entrepreneurial functions which they 'sell' to other companies etc.; (c) 'a powerful development of communication networks, both physical and information networks, needed to integrate fragmented production and scattered functions, together with the emergence, in the form of companies, of systems integrating parts/functions' (Castillo, 1994, p. 283). These changes, when theorizing them, have been heralded as 'new production models': lean production, flexible specialization; but the theories have given no information on their impact on social labour relations, qualification and living and working conditions (Sociología del Trabajo nº 27, 1996).

Parallel to these processes, economic and employment policies have been introduced which have changed the social reality of work with repercussions on the labour market and on workers, either through restructuring processes or through 'flexibilization' of the labour market with a steady deterioration of guarantee systems for workers.

Since 1975, Spain has undergone 'an impressive mobilization of the workforce which led to the destruction between 1975 and 1985 of almost two million jobs and a subsequent recovery between 1985 and 1990 (Homs, 1992, p. 323). This change was accompanied by a vast destruction of qualification and a rupture in occupational career histories (as will be shown later in the restructuring of the chemical industry and industrial conversion processes) which affected workers who were *'... highly qualified, with much experience, learning, capacity of improvisation, and great research ability in the fullest sense of the*

term' (5)[3]. Later, in the recovery process following 1985, companies resorted to the external labour market recruiting 'manpower which contained an abundance of young persons with high levels of education and a different work culture' (Homs, 1992, p. 324). Even if one of the characteristic features of this young manpower was its higher level of training, within the concrete context of labour relations, what was required was personal flexibility, a capacity to adapt to the rhythm of work, acceptance of rotating working hours and work at weekends.

Under these circumstances, the education administration undertook the reform of the education system through the Law on the general regulation of the education system (LOGSE) of 3 October 1990 and, in more concrete terms, the development of the new model of vocational education and training presented in January 1992. This revised training contents to adapt them to qualification requirements of the production system. In other words 'it approached a new model of professionality' (López et al., 1995, p. 45) in which qualification is expressed 'in terms of abilities and occupational competences making it possible for those who received training to acquire the multiple skills required to carry out several jobs belonging to the same occupational field' (id.)

The labour administration approved the vocational training and occupational integration plan (plan FIP) after having detected a 'lack or inadequacy of workers' knowledge and skills preventing them from obtaining a suitable placement (..) and which has a direct impact on productivity and competitiveness of the Spanish industrial enterprise' (Eusebio, 1989, p. 82)[4]. Its aims are the training, retraining and qualification of job-seekers (who make up 20% of the working population, that is, almost three million persons), of workers made redundant through industrial restructuring, of the long-term unemployed, etc. with a view to adapting them to the needs of the labour market and companies. An idea of the magnitude of plan FIP may be obtained from the increase in financing resources from 15 000 million ESP in 1985 to 120 000 million ESP in 1990.

1.4. The reform of vocational education and training

In the context of a policy directed at the creation of employment and 'a climate conducive to the attainment of this objective', the Economic and Social Agreement (AES) signed in 1984, introduced certain stipulations which had an effect on vocational training as one of the elements required to reform the labour market. The deficiencies of the labour market in Spain were due to the fact that vocational education and training was far from being geared to the manpower needs of the production system.

[3] The sentences in italics between quotation marks which appear in the text of this report are quotes from interviews. The number in brackets refers to the person who is quoted and who can be identified from the list of interviewed persons given at the end of the report.

[4] A research project on the participation of the social partners found that the unilateral adoption of plan FIP by the government without taking account of the social partners, which gave only limited scope for the training of workers in employment 'slowed down the adaptation of the workforce to the demands of technological and organizational innovation with major repercussions on the productivity and competitiveness of the economy' (Villarejo,1988).

Thus a number of provisions were included in this agreement with the aim of:

(a) substantially increasing research on the labour market;

(b) making the social partners participate in defining the objectives of vocational training activities;

(c) integrating vocational training in employment programmes.

The Economic and Social Agreement (AES) also contained a provision to set up a general council for vocational training which was created through Law 1/1986 of 7 January 1986 as a consultative body, promoting institutional participation and advising the government on matters related to regulated and occupational vocational training. The council has been assigned the following responsibilities, among others:

(a) draw up the national vocational training programme (PNFP) and submit it to the government for approval;

(b) give information on titles and/or vocational certificates and study plans proposing levels of equivalence, and where necessary, mutual recognition;

(c) evaluate, monitor and follow up actions developed in the field of vocational training.

In keeping with these assigned tasks the general council for vocational training drew up the national vocational training programme (PNFP) for the period 1993-96 which was approved by the Council of Ministers on 5 March 1993. In the meantime and on its own initiative, the education administration continued the process of reforming regulated vocational training by promulgating the Law on the general regulation of the education system (LOGSE); the labour administration carried out the corresponding reform of occupational vocational training through Royal Decree 631/1993 of 3 March 1993; and finally, the national agreement on continuing training (ANFC) was signed on 16 December 1992 by employers' associations and the most representative trade union organizations at State level, joined later by the Galician Trade Union Confederation (Confederación Intersindical Gallega – CIG).

The common feature in this tight schedule of social concertation and institutionalization in the field of vocational training was the recognition of the strategic role played by vocational training in training policies, development policies, the improvement of the production structure, employment policies, policies for economic, regional and local development and the new labour framework in Europe. As stated in the introduction to the first PNFP, 'training and vocational training in particular, constitutes one of the priority objectives of any country which pursues strategies of growth, technological development and improvement of the quality of life of its citizens'.

To accomplish the different strategic functions and objectives assigned to vocational training it was decided to set up a body within the first PNFP to provide technical support for: the establishment of a national system of qualifications (Sistema Nacional de las Cualificaciones – SNC); updating the catalogue of vocational titles and directory of certificates of occupational proficiency; and the establishment of a system for equivalence

between regulated vocational training and occupational vocational training and work experience.

This led to the establishment, as an experimental step, of the interministerial unit for occupational qualifications (Unidad Interministerial para Cualificaciones Profesionales – UICP) – approved by the Council of Ministers on 18 February 1994 – consisting of representatives of the education and labour administrations with the objective of coordinating the functions relating to occupational qualifications and training needs linked to them to achieve the goals of the first PNFP. The objective was not reached because the functioning of the unit was terminated at the end of the programme.

The new government which came to power in 1996 continued the policies of social concertation and maintained priority for vocational training after encouraging negotiation rounds. These promoted social dialogue and led to agreement on the basis of vocational training policy and the second agreement on continuing training, and culminated in the elaboration of the second PNFP by the general council for vocational training in 1997.

What is the position of informal learning in this process of institutionalization?

1.5. Informal learning in Spain

There are different levels of approach for the identification, assessment and recognition of informal learning in Spain. One level consists of the multiple informal practices in management policies and methods of managing the workforce (in particular at the time of recruiting 'their' workers)[5]

The prerequisites listed in vacancies published in national newspapers[6] not only mention the title and academic knowledge required, but also skills and know-how acquired by informal means: 'should possess the ability to work in a team, show initiative, and have interpersonal and negotiating' skills; another company stresses the 'communication and interpersonal skills' of the candidate and another seeks a worker 'who is keenly interested in new technologies, is well organized, independent, willing to work hard and has analytical ability'. These advertisements also reveal a differentiation in the social skills required according to the category of the job to which they refer. Requirements are different for jobs with lower qualifications. For example, for a teleoperator the requirement is 'absolute availability' and for a female cashier 'a pleasant appearance and agreeable manners'.

Thus, within the fragmentation of employer/employee relations brought about by the introduction of temporary job companies (Empresas de Trabajo Temporal – ETT), some forms and practices of recognition of non-formal knowledge and learning may be detected. The high level of rotation of ETT workers between different enterprises (in terms of activity, management methods and organization) leads to situations in these enterprises

[5] That is what we gathered when studying staff management in small enterprises belonging to local production systems (Santos, M. Fernández, J. and Alas-Pumariño, A., 1997-98).

[6] We analysed the vacancies and business sections of the Sunday supplements of daily newspapers *ABC* and *El País*. The phrases in quotation marks are extracts of advertisements which appeared on 19 July 1998 in *ABC*.

where learning and knowledge are assessed in terms of the employment relationships *'... they have to be people who can, within two days, identify the types of links between the sections of a company in which they are going to work for two months'*(10).

Also, in social practice, qualifications acquired outside a job relationship can be identified, such as work done by women in family enterprises, in the hotel/restaurant sector or in domestic service or care at homes for the aged, of children, etc. These jobs are considered in employment promotion policies to be 'new' sources of employment where the qualification has been acquired in a non-salaried job relationship or by helping at home.

Public administrations also employ some methods to recognise qualifications acquired through informal means. The regional administration of Madrid issues, at the request of its workers, a 'work report on functions' in which it sets out, in addition to the title and administrative classification of the worker, a detailed description of the principal functions exercised. These reports are useful for promotion or internal mobility and have no validity whatsoever outside the work environment of the regional administration.

Although such practices are quite widespread, they have not yet triggered a systematic discussion of informal learning. One of the contributions of this survey has been to help arouse interest in non-formal training. Leaders of the trade union organizations and employers' associations whom we interviewed showed interest in this subject and in the possibility of creating a system which would recognise qualifications and knowledge acquired through informal means in the new national system of qualifications.

The introduction and development of systems which identify, recognise and assess informal learning in Spain are in an embryonic stage. Elaboration of the national system of qualifications and constitution of the national institute for qualifications are the main (and almost the only) priorities set by the central administration (labour and education), the regional governments and the trade unions and employers' organizations. They all think the definition and approval of these two steps should precede a discussion of any other subject related to vocational qualification, and that the national system of qualifications and the national institute for qualifications should at first be called upon to define and create the framework in which the issues we are studying should be placed and discussed. The last negotiated proposal for the creation of the national institute for qualifications which we could consult was dated 21 July 1998 and was a draft version of the Royal Decree Law.

Until now, there have been few meetings and debates on the recognition and validation of informal learning in Spain. Of the most recent discussions, mention may be made of the 'Forum on qualifications' organized by the CIREM Foundation in the first six months of 1997 and the 'meetings on vocational training: qualifications and certification', organized by Comisiones Obreras in March 1998.

It should also be noted that both in documents and government regulations and in the debates on the recognition of informal learning, work experience is considered to be the only path outside the education system through which qualification can be acquired and enhanced. Thus, work experience is transformed into the primary and only form of recognition of informal learning.

1.6. The status of work experience in the social debate

In the debate on the recognition of work experience in an integrated vocational training system, a consensus shared by the government and the social partners was obtained through the adoption of the second national vocational training programme.

The first national vocational training programme stipulated the need to set up a system of correspondence and validation between regulated vocational training, occupational vocational training and work experience. In the subsequent development of the programme through the interministerial unit for vocational qualifications (UICP), work experience was included as an object of accreditation to be integrated in the future national system of qualifications (SNC), but the interruption of the unit's work some months later made it impossible to broach the subject in depth.

Work experience was also considered, in an incipient form, in the definition of vocational training titles and, more explicitly, in the development of certificates of occupational proficiency. Therefore, when the second national vocational training programme was adopted, work experience was included as a form of acquiring knowledge and skills in the integrated vocational training system and given a higher status and importance than in the first programme.

The field work conducted by our team and analysis of documents to which we had access prepared by the education and labour administrations and the social partners, made it possible to identify distinctive features in the debate on the recognition of non-formal learning as part of qualification.

With respect to how all this should be designed, the determinant factors influencing the establishment of the national system of qualifications are new demands increasingly subjecting occupational skills to the components of information technology. The changes in the technical contents brought about by technological developments have also led to organizational change, with a need for new skills, abilities and attitudes which mean the definition of new competences and social content in qualifications. The focus is on the technical contents of qualification and giving a more refined definition of the units of competence which can form part of the different fields making up the occupation. Both the education and labour administrations and representatives of the employers' associations follow this line of thought.

In the field of concrete job relations and in the context of the labour market with its high level of uncertainty, as is the case in the construction sector, the recognition of work experience implies *'... the regularization of a number of situations which affect a very large number of workers who, while doing highly professional work, have absolutely no formal recognition'* (2).

The importance of getting recognition of work experience for numerous groups of workers in different sectors undergoing restructuring processes (steel, chemical, naval, etc.) means that accreditation of work-based knowledge becomes an important option which can raise their formal qualifications and social recognition on the labour market. Other factors which lead to the necessity of recognizing informal learning are to be found in the changes in labour relations taking place in Spain and the need to recognise different

occupational itineraries through the entire stretch of working life. Itineraries which also include periods of unemployment alternating with periods of work '... we see that a worker, in the course of his working life will, at the very least, move through six different jobs and will go through periods of employment and unemployment. Thus, this worker will have to train himself for the new demands of the job he is going to get' (4).

This recognition of informal learning acquired through work experience is, however, manifested in dissimilar ways by workers depending to a greater or lesser degree on the bargaining power of each group of workers, and other factors such as the size of the company and variations between the different occupational categories.

Given these situations and experiences in the field of concrete job relations, the trade unions stress the need to recognise the contribution made by work practice to qualification and occupational competence and the necessity of its accreditation and certification. From the trade union perspective it is recognised that *'... the increase of the number of standardized skills in concrete work situations is a historical fact'* (1) which is incorporated in different corporate policies and strategies, and is to be seen in the formulation of new forms of personnel management, without however being translated into the corresponding changes in work organization.

Summing up, in the opinion of trade unions, when considering the introduction of systems and methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning, *'... it is not new problems which arise but very old problems for which no form of solution has been found in the past.'* (2).

2. METHODOLOGIES, INSTITUTIONS AND SYSTEMS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING

In this chapter we will describe and analyse the schemes and initiatives set up to identify, recognise and establish the role played by non-formal learning in the social process of constructing qualifications.

The first stage of our research consisted of a review of bibliography and documentation. We first systematically scanned the principal national libraries and documentation centres dealing with this thematic area, qualification and education. The documentary resources of the following libraries were reviewed: the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; the Economic and Social Council; the Complutense University of Madrid (in particular that of the Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology); the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Madrid; the Official State Gazette; Documentation Centre of the Office of the European Union in Spain; the Julian Besteiro School of the General Workers Union (UGT); and the Institute for Information and Documentation on Social Sciences (ISOC) of the Higher Council for Scientific Research. At the same time, through the internet we had access to various databases and documentation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the National Institute for Employment.

At the same time we drew up a research project which enabled us to reply to the questions raised in the ' CEDEFOP project on identification, evaluation and recognition of non-formal learning'. Our proposal on methodology was taken as the basis to prepare an interview guide with which the interviews of other researchers, representatives of the government (national, regional and local), trade unions and employers' organizations could be conducted. Altogether we carried out 30 interviews. Twelve of them were recorded on tape and transcribed later. Through these interviews, it was possible for us to get to know and collect the views on non-formal learning of the representatives of trade unions, employers and the labour and education authorities, and identify the schemes which were being implemented in Spain.

Before presenting the experiences we compiled, we should state that the initiatives and experiences turn – even if to different degrees – a part of their attention to non-formal learning, especially the learning acquired through work experience.

We have classified the collected experiences into five groups. The first group refers to the role played by non-formal learning in public employment policies.

In the second section, we examine the status given to non-formal learning by the education authorities, the provisions for access to the formal education system and the scope for recognition of non-formal qualifications.

Thirdly, we present all the information available on the new national system of qualifications and on the creation of the national institute for qualifications. Both of them will, from this year onwards (1998), be charged with the definition and management of national policy on qualifications and vocational training. This is a field in which systems for

the identification, recognition and certification of non-formal learning will have to be discussed and designed in the coming years. In addition, we will also include the experience gained by the Basque Institute for Qualifications operated by the regional government and the social partners in the Basque country.

We will present the most important approaches (although there are still large areas of clarity/obscurity) for the recognition of non-formal learning with the ultimate aim of certification of vocational qualifications acquired through work experience and the occupational vocational training systems.

Finally, we will examine the recognition of non-formal learning within the field of collective bargaining, as an area belonging to the concrete context of job relations. Three experiences in the chemical sector, the construction sector and the industrial conversion and restructuring of the steel sector will be presented.

2.1. Recognition and assessment of non-formal learning in employment policies

One of the areas in which we found the first traces of recognition and assessment of non-formal learning was that of employment policy. In the past two decades, the Spanish Ministry of Labour has launched several initiatives to increase employment and facilitate the job integration of unemployed persons. With the exception of certificates of occupational proficiency, which we referred to earlier, none of the initiatives listed under the general heading of 'employment policies' includes the recognition and accreditation of qualifications, knowledge and competences acquired through informal means. However, all employment policies, to a greater or lesser degree, explicitly recognise the importance of this type of knowledge for integration in working life.

2.1.1. Joint employment and vocational training programmes

Training workshops and crafts training centres are joint employment/training programmes which aim to provide qualifications for unemployed youth below the age of 25 through alternance training combined with practical experience in activities related to restoration of national heritage, improvement of the environment and urban areas and the revival of crafts occupations. Both programmes commenced their activities as experimental schemes in 1985. Currently, they are regulated by the Order of 3 August 1994 of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

The programmes of the training workshops and crafts training centres combine occupational training with periods of practical experience. The practical training and envisaged activities have the aim of contributing to the progressive socialization of the trainee (unemployed person) through common work and activity, providing experience and inculcating attitudes which are appropriate for the job the person will have in future. The labour authorities think that the experience of '*learning while working* has proved to be very valuable, not only for vocational qualification and the acquisition of experience but also for the consolidation of employers' initiatives' (Ministerial Order of 3 August 1994).

The programmes consist of two phases. The first phase deals with occupational vocational training and has a maximum duration of six months. The second phase alternates training with periods of work for a maximum period of one and a half years in training workshops and 6 months in crafts training centres. During this period, trainees are given a training contract by the sponsoring agency. When the two periods are over, the worker receives a certificate issued by the agency attesting the number of hours the trainee attended the programme, the acquired qualification and the training modules completed. It is planned to use this certificate for validation through a certificate of occupational proficiency issued by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and it is also planned to use it to validate the modules corresponding to the specific vocational training regulated in LOGSE. This system of certification, which has been legislated but has not yet been put into practice, requires the recognition (and later the certification) of qualifications acquired in combined systems: occupational training (regulated) is completed by experience in the workplace.

In 1996, the last year for which we have data, there were 635 training workshops in Spain attended by 26 538 trainees and 175 crafts training centres with 5 130 participants.

2.1.2. Integrated services plans for employment

Active employment policies also recognise the important role of non-formal learning. The labour authorities believe that non-formal learning serves a basic function in the job integration of unemployed persons. Documents from ministries and methodological guides developed in these programmes continuously refer to informal learning as an 'active asset' in the quest for employment.

The general principles of this policy were laid down in the Royal Decree 735/1995 of 5 May 1995. Through this royal decree the Ministry of Labour develops a series of programmes called 'integrated services plans for employment' which aim to increase the occupation of unemployed persons. The fight against unemployment makes it necessary, as a priority action, to strengthen the organization and instruments and development of active employment policies, and also to optimize the resources of the national institute for employment, with the goal of enhancing its efficiency and avoiding excessive bureaucracy' (Royal Decree 735/1995). The aim is to optimise public and private resources to promote the job integration of various groups with the highest unemployment levels (youth, women, disabled and long-term unemployed).

These programmes consist of 'actions of a personalized and systematic nature which integrate all elements of support to the job-seeker for his integration into working life' (Article 1 of the Ministerial Order of 10 October 1995). The 'integrated services plans for employment' have the aim of putting job-seekers in a better position on the labour market and opening better employment opportunities. The various programmes implicitly recognise the important role of informal qualifications and non-formal learning in the job integration process.

The process starts with an occupational interview which begins by making an occupational classification of the job-seeker. The occupational interview organized by the national institute for employment (INEM) and the collaborating bodies associated with this

programme (municipalities, employers' organizations, trade unions, chambers of commerce and industry, and other non-profit organizations), have the aim of identifying the occupational profile of the job-seeker. Through an in-depth interview, relevant information on unemployed persons is collected, personal identification data, their socioeconomic characteristics, their level of studies and, what is more important for the purpose of our research, their work experience and other specific knowledge and skills (not acquired in the education system). This information is used to find the job vacancies and occupational training courses most suited to each job-seeker.

The labour authorities think that skills, knowledge and competences acquired informally by unemployed persons play a fundamental role in the job-seeking process, and they should all be reinforced and mobilized. However, under no circumstances can these occupational interviews be regarded as a system or methodology for identifying and recognizing non-formal learning.

In some cases, the occupational interview does not suffice to ascertain the vocational qualifications of the unemployed person. Occupational qualification tests are required to identify and verify, through practical and theoretical exercises, the occupational profile and the qualification of the unemployed person. These tests assume prior recognition of occupational qualifications without ascertaining whether this is due entirely or partially to non-formal learning processes. The results of the occupational qualification tests are used to establish the occupational profile of the unemployed person and to classify him/her in one of the categories used for the selection of job vacancies.

The occupational qualification tests are normally undertaken when unemployed persons are systematically rejected by employers or when the labour authorities have some doubts about the qualification presented for accreditation by the unemployed persons. These tests are carried out in groups and consist of a questionnaire with questions on the occupation and a number of practical exercises which include the principal tasks of the occupation concerned. The national institute for employment has designed occupational qualification tests for 35 different subjects (trades). The tests are held in occupational training centres run directly by INEM. The results of the occupational qualification tests are recorded in the 'application for employment' submitted by the unemployed person but, in no case, is the qualification obtained accredited through the issue of a certificate. This is more in the nature of a 'filter' which makes it possible to identify, qualify and classify the job-seeker. It is a process which only has validity when the job-seeker approaches INEM with an application for employment.

Among the various schemes envisaged in the integrated services plans for employment, personal employment and training plans are the ones which pay most attention to non-formal learning. The objective of these plans is that each unemployed person should, with the assistance and support of a technical specialist specialized in job guidance and support, design his own project and itinerary for job integration. The first step in the elaboration of this project is to identify all the personal resources facilitating employment and to examine the deficiencies. An in-depth interview is held to reconstruct the training and vocational biography of each unemployed person. The idea is to identify and stress all the resources, interests, skills, abilities and competences of the person seeking employment. The methodological guides (prepared by the central services of INEM) which

are applied in the implementation of this action ask direct questions on the non-certified skills and abilities of the unemployed person. The technical specialist directing this scheme and the unemployed person have to 'identify the personal and professional resources' for employment by 'exploring positive experiences and activities (work-related and non-work-related) and by identifying resources, skills, competences, occupational potential and professional interests' (INEM 1997a, p.10). In this way, non-formal learning becomes one more 'active asset' in the search for employment. This scheme explicitly acknowledges that non-formal learning plays a fundamental role in seeking employment and that it should be strengthened and viewed as an additional competence factor.

In addition to the interview, the personal employment and training plan also includes a self-assessment questionnaire in which the unemployed person has to evaluate his interests and skills in terms of various activities (artistic, commercial, technical, scientific or administrative) and undergo some psycho-technical tests aimed at assessing his aptitude for arithmetic, expression, logic, etc.

The second scheme in the integrated services plans for employment which specifically refers to non-formal learning and social skills is entitled 'development of personal traits for employment (DAPO)'. The aim of this scheme is to promote the occupational integration of the long-term unemployed (more than one year of continuous unemployment) or socially disadvantaged groups who face special difficulties in the search for work.

The methodological guide states 'there are internal factors in the person which impede/favour integration in the labour market' (INEM, 1997b, p.14). This programme has the aim of developing – through group activities – attitudes and social skills such as 'security, confidence, self-esteem, availability, personal and professional self-image' (INEM, 1997b, p. 43), the capacity for oral and written expression, calculation and job-seeking techniques. The envisaged objective is that, once this process with a duration of some five weeks is completed, the position of the unemployed person will improve *vis-à-vis* employment and 'will stimulate him actively to seek employment' (INEM, 1997b, p. 2).

In the different stages of the scheme 'development of personal traits for employment (DAPO)' various group exercises and team games are organized to underline the 'factors which influence the obtaining of employment' and to set up a number of individual and collective objectives. The aim is to establish social links between participants and to trigger a process of reflection on employment and the individual and collective characteristics and potentialities required to obtain a job. Work is undertaken on 'external' and 'internal' aspects (training, experience, age, motivation, etc.) affecting the quest for employment. Through games and exercises, the group practises oral and written communication and learns to 'get moving' and seek information and material on jobs in the immediate surroundings. The precondition for this method is the recognition by the labour authorities of the important role played by social skills, work experience, interests and hobbies, etc. (all factors which are not linked to formal learning) in the process of occupational integration.

In the past three years (1996-98), the number of integrated services plans for employment have increased considerably. This started with a pilot scheme in 1995 in six districts and today it is to be found in most municipalities with more than 50 000 inhabitants. As an

example, in 1998 in the region of Madrid alone, there were intentions to establish 6 236 personal employment and training plans and schemes for the 'development of personal traits for employment (DAPO)' for 1 563 beneficiaries. However, the effectiveness of these schemes is being questioned by municipal corporations. It is feared that these plans are being used to increase the administrative control of unemployed persons and to shorten the lists of registered unemployed persons.

2.1.3. Programmes for the support and promotion of self-employment

Employment policies also include programmes for the support and promotion of self-employment. Recognition of non-formal learning was not found in any of the examined cases, but it was assumed that prior work experience, knowledge of the social context and tradition or family background were essential to start new business activities.

As in the other countries in our region, great importance has been attached in the past few decades in Spain to self-employment as a policy instrument to reduce high unemployment levels. A large number of programmes have been developed to stimulate the start-up of small businesses by unemployed persons. The self-employment promotion programmes which we analysed (the self-employment promotion schemes of the National Institute for Employment; the company workshops of the Basque government; the plan for the creation of new enterprises in the community of Madrid; or the self-employment programmes of the regional government of Catalonia), take work experience and the social skills of the business starter as the point of departure for 'the inculcation of the entrepreneurial spirit and promotion of the innovative capacities of the persons concerned' (IMADE, 1991, p. 8).

In these programmes, competences obtained in informal areas play a priority role right from the start. The process of selection of candidates in all cases are based on questionnaires and interviews undertaken to evaluate 'the degree of interest in and enthusiasm for' the business project and psychological aspects (initiative, leadership, responsibility, etc.) and skills (relational and negotiation aptitudes, communication skills and ability for social relationships, business acumen, etc.) of the business starter. Other aspects which are considered to be important are the entrepreneurial socialization process of the business starter (family background on which questions are systematically asked in all the questionnaires) and job experience. The institutions administering these programmes (INEM, Madrid Development Institute – IMADE –, or the Basque Society for the Promotion of Industrial Conversion – SPRI) all recommend that these business projects should be built up on the basis of experience (professional and family), and knowledge and skills closely related to the needs of the new entrepreneurs. The handbooks recommend an approach which 'analyses personal characteristics, inherent abilities, acquired know-how, professional interests and the personal significance of work for the person concerned' (García Sola, 1998) Work experience, skills and hobbies/interests should be the main factors taken into consideration when seeking an activity on which to base a business.

In some striking cases, as in the programmes promoted by the Basque government, 'professional consultants, above 55, in the preretirement stage or unemployed or in full employment, with experience of SME management' in sectors undergoing industrial

conversion and restructuring (SPRI, 1988), are used as teachers to advise and support business starters. The aim of this initiative is to transfer, as far as possible, the experience and know-how in business management accumulated over the years from one generation to the next, and it demonstrates the importance which non-formal learning processes have gained in these activities. Informal learning is not certified, but it is assessed and recognised to the point of attempting to transfer this knowledge, this collective qualification from one generation to another. It is a system of business consultancy which, as stated in a brochure of the association Senior Citizens for Technical Cooperation (SECOT), 'puts at the disposal of new owners/managers of small and medium-sized enterprises in the process of consolidation, the business experience of experts at management level, retired and preretired persons who offer their services on a voluntary basis.'

In other cases (community of Madrid), the courses aim to encourage exchange of experience between participants. Visits to companies are organized and meetings are held with entrepreneurs who have previously participated in similar programmes with the aim of enabling the socialization and capitalization of informal knowledge and skills.

It is very difficult to evaluate the vast number of training schemes of this type carried out every year because of the wide dispersion of sponsoring bodies (public development institutes, business organizations, INEM, municipal corporations, etc.) which hold these courses. As an example we will take the results of the programmes organized in 1997 by the Madrid Development Institute (IMADE) run by the government of the Madrid region. This institute carried out 102 courses. These were divided into two types of courses: motivation and initiation courses with 19 hours of instruction (16 hours of theory and three hours of individual tutoring); and courses for business start-up with a duration of 91 hours (84 hours of theoretical training and seven hours of tutoring). Eighty courses of the first type were organized in which 860 trainees participated. Twenty-two courses for business start-up were also organized with a total attendance of 223 trainees. We also have data supplied by the European Centre for Enterprises and Innovation of the government of Navarra; this centre, in the past 10 years (1988-98), held courses in which 450 'business starters' participated. '340 plans for viable businesses were established, 306 new enterprises were set up which created approximately 900 jobs and had an investment volume over 1000 million pesetas' (CEIN, 1998, p.1).

2.2. Does the education system recognise non-formal learning?

We examined the Spanish education system, in particular regulated vocational training, seeking areas and points where the recognition, assessment and certification of non-formal learning were to be found. We did not detect a single case where the education administration has certified qualifications acquired through informal processes. However, in the law on the general regulation of the education system (LOGSE) and in the reform of education initiated after it was passed, there is a greater inclination than in the previous system to assess and recognise non-formal learning.

LOGSE in general and the reform of vocational training in particular, try to adapt training provisions to the socioeconomic problems of the environment in which it takes place. This means that there is a need to establish close relations and cooperation with the social partners to respond to qualification requirements arising on the labour market. One example of this trend is the great importance attached in the reform of vocational training to the link between companies and education centres, thus breaking with the 'exclusively school-based logic' (MEC, 1992, p. 14) which prevailed to date in the vocational training system.

Article 34.2. of LOGSE stipulates that training in work centres has to be an explicit and mandatory part of the vocational training curriculum. To ensure that vocational qualification corresponds to the levels required in employment, it tries to promote convergence between education centres and companies by setting up a system of practical training periods. The Ministry of Education and Culture implicitly recognises that in-school training should be completed by other knowledge and know-how acquired outside the education system through social environments. 'The most relevant characteristic of this training is that it takes place in a real production environment where trainees can observe and perform actions and functions belonging to the workplace of a profession, get to know the organization of productive processes or the services and labour relations in the company' (MEC, 1992, p. 23) Periods of practical training in the work centre enable trainees 'to get acquainted with the real situation of actual work' (MEC, 1992, p. 24).

This not only calls for participation of the social partners in the elaboration of this new vocational training provision but also requires the establishment of genuine 'concerted training', a concept which has the aim of increasing and extending the actual experience of 'alternate periods of practical training' and creating links between centres and companies.

In the vocational training reform process, the new catalogue of vocational titles plays a fundamental role. The preparation of this catalogue was undertaken with the active participation of the social partners. In the general council for vocational training they first approved the methodology proposed for its elaboration and later the outline curricula drawn up by the education administration. The methodology developed for the elaboration of the catalogue is based on an analysis of current work situations and qualification demands in the different sectors of production. The methodology used by the education authorities to draw up an occupational profile was divided into seven steps: the first step was to undertake, with the participation of the social partners, an examination and description of the sector of activity in which the qualification to be accredited was to be found. The next step was to analyse the production process of this sector and to identify and describe the occupational areas in which regulated vocational training programmes had to be developed; the third step consisted of identifying the 'occupational categories' which make up the reference framework of the production system to define the 'matching training' for each title; in the fourth step, the occupational area of the titles was structured and the competence units and occupational modules were delineated. The next step was to undertake forecasting studies. The sixth step consisted of identifying knowledge and skills, defining the training specifications for the titles and dividing training into the

structural modules consisting of 'basic vocational training' and 'specific vocational training'. Finally, external verification of the defined titles was completed. After this process was finalised, new occupational profiles, training paths and vocational titles were presented to the general council for vocational training so that it could discuss the contents and their adequacy before submitting it to the government for approval.

As we said earlier, the new academic system of vocational training attaches much importance to periods of practical training in an enterprise. That is why all new training cycles contain two compulsory modules: work training and guidance and training in work centres.

Training in the work centre modules, even though they have an academic element, are the best example of the growing assessment and recognition of non-formal learning by education authorities. The Ministry of Education, when implementing these modules and strengthenin alternance training programmes, is aware of the necessity of complementing academic (formal) learning through other forms of knowledge and competence acquired in the work centre through informal mechanisms; special mention must be made of the role played by collective aspects of qualification.

Training in the work centre modules are an inherent part (which has to be evaluated and assessed) of the training process and are compulsory in all training cycles at intermediate and higher levels. Their aim is to complete and enhance the training acquired in the education centre through work experience obtained in a real work situation.

The objectives of training in the work centre modules are:

1. Complete the vocational competence acquired by the trainee in the education centre by undertaking a number of training activities which have been identified as productive activities of the work centre.
2. Contribute to the successful attainment of the general objectives of vocational training: acquire the characteristic vocational competence required for each title and a professional identity and maturity motivating future learning and adaptation to changes in qualifications.
3. Evaluate the most relevant aspects of vocational competence acquired by the training and, in particular, accredit the most relevant aspects of the competences required for the job (as laid down in the profile for each title) which cannot be obtained in the training centre because they require the real situations arising in production.
4. Acquire knowledge of the organization of production corresponding to the occupational profile and the system of socio-labour relations in the work centre, to facilitate occupational integration later.

This module is carried out in the production environment 'where trainees can observe and perform functions belonging to the different workplaces pertaining to their occupation, can get to know the organization of production processes or actual services; they are guided and counselled throughout by a person responsible for monitoring their activities in the work centre or the education centre' (MEC, 1994, p.13). Depending on the specific

occupation in question, the duration of these modules ranges from 300 to 400 hours of practical training in an enterprise, undertaken in working hours similar to the working day, 'thus facilitating direct observation of the beginning and the end of the processes and integration in the system of socio-labour relations prevailing in the enterprise' (MEC, 1994, p.13).

In addition to the vocational training reform which contains the training modules in the work centre, the education administration has other programmes in which, to a greater or lesser degree, informal learning is recognised.

The social guarantee programmes, developed jointly by local corporations and the Ministry of Education, provide basic and vocational training for pupils who have abandoned their studies without having completed compulsory secondary education; this training enables them to enter working life or pursue further vocational training studies. These programmes have a structure similar to that of occupational vocational training. Basically, the trainee does practical work in workshops which simulate working conditions in an enterprise. The courses which, as a rule, correspond to occupational profiles at qualification level 1, give trainees a title belonging to the social guarantee programmes issued by the ministry. This certificate, in turn, is one of the prerequisites for admission to the tests for adults which enable access to the vocational training system.

The ministry also wishes, within the framework of regulated vocational training, to develop a system of distance vocational training which will be flexible and adapted to the needs of the adult population. As an experiment, the Ministry has implemented the following vocational modules for distance training: domestic trade, administrative and management assistant, line maintenance fitter and electrical and maintenance fitter. The Ministry of Education believes that this will be 'a potentially important means of offering the working and/or adult population the opportunity of getting a requalification through the education system' (MEC, 1992, p. 49).

The Ministry of Education and Culture, furthermore, recognises that vocational qualification may be acquired through work experience, through progress and training on the job. Workers whose acquisition of a work-based qualification is accredited, can enter the regulated vocational training system to get requalification or upgrade their training. Through this the ministry opens an area of contact between the world of work and the training system, explicitly recognizing the qualifications acquired by working in a job. 'The adult population which gets accreditation for the possession of a certain vocational competence (expressed by the aggregate of occupational activities and occupational skills associated with each module) can *capitalize* its practical occupational experience in the work centres in the form of training credits leading to the corresponding title. A standard for a system of correspondence and validation will have to be developed' (MEC, 1992, p.47). This standard (the Royal Decree 777/1998) has recently been promulgated but not yet implemented in detail. It lays down the procedures for correspondence and validation of titles (Catalogue of vocational titles-Directory of certificates of occupational proficiency) and the specific tests required for access by adults without secondary education to the vocational training system.

The organization of vocational training titles, in keeping with LOGSE, establishes 'occupational modules' which can be validated as occupational vocational training and are equivalent to practical training. Before applying for the correspondence of occupational modules with practical training, the trainee has to enroll in a public centre run by the education administration and has to pass a test. This has the aim of demonstrating that applicants are sufficiently prepared to complete successfully the training cycle (intermediate or higher), have enough maturity to achieve the aims of the baccalaureate, and have the skills required in the occupational field concerned. To gain admission to this test, they have to be at least 18 years of age; they must have completed a social guarantee programme and obtained one of the certificates of occupational proficiency, and must provide proof of at least one year of work experience in the occupational field for which they wish to enroll.

The content of the test is geared to the official curriculum of compulsory secondary education for intermediate level and the baccalaureate for the higher level. Candidates who can provide evidence of at least one year of work experience clearly related to the vocational studies which they wish to pursue, are exempted from the specific part (vocational competence) of the test. Work experience and its correspondence with vocational studies are reviewed by the evaluation committee. The evaluation committees which also have the task of holding and marking the admission tests are made up of five members belonging to the vocational training staff of the Ministry of Education.

Candidates who pass the test can obtain a certificate issued by the centre where they did the tests needed for admission to and enrolment in the corresponding training cycles. As a result, the vocational training module in the work centres which is equivalent to work practice, is registered as exempted in the academic record of the trainee, in the evaluation files and in the register of qualifications; however, this module is not taken into consideration in the final evaluation of the training cycle.

The ministry recognises training acquired in the work centres when the following conditions are fulfilled:

(a) at the moment of enrolling in the training cycle, the candidate should provide evidence of at least one year's work experience related to the vocational studies which he/she intends to pursue;

(b) the candidate should present a certificate from the General Treasury of Social Security which attests the work centre, the type of contract and the period of recruitment;

(c) the candidate should present a certificate from the company in which he acquired work experience which specifically states the duration of the contract, the activities undertaken and the period of recruitment. Once this documentation has been presented, together with a previous report written by all the teachers and the director of the centre, it is possible, in the intermediate cycles, to give the candidate a certificate of total or partial exemption from the need to undergo one or several modules of the training path laid down for the specific subject concerned. Normally, 'training in the work centre' modules are validated because they are considered to be equivalent to work experience acquired in the work centres.

The cardinal question in facilitating the requalification and reintegration of the adult population in the education system is the establishment of a system of correspondence and validation covering occupational training, work experience and regulated vocational training. The modular structure of the curricula designed for future training centres should make a decisive contribution to the establishment of this correspondence system.

There is no categorically explicit answer to the question we asked at the beginning of this section, 'does the Spanish education system recognise informal learning?'. The reform of the education system and in particular the reform of vocational training studies have opened up new paths for the recognition and assessment of non-formal learning. The education authorities are attaching more and more value to learning and training acquired outside education centres and have a greater interest in developing education systems which combine classroom learning with practical training, in work centres for example. However, these are paths which are still little explored. Furthermore, the few paths of access to the education system which have been constructed to date, have been set up from a perspective in which academic criteria prevails. As we saw earlier, in practice, work experience only leads to validation of practical training (the 'work centre training' module). The difficulties of access to the system are increased by a large number of formal prerequisites and the final necessity of undergoing tests to prove academic knowledge which is not always related to the vocational qualification which the candidate wishes to obtain. Qualifications acquired in work centres are still not valued highly, they have a low level of recognition and are never certified by the education system. Insufficient value is still attached to work experience and thus, the mechanisms for its recognition are still lacking when attempting to get access to new vocational training modules.

2.3. The national system of qualifications

Spain, at present, does not have a national system of qualifications, but for the past 10 years work on the definition and establishment of such a system has been going on. Already in the first national vocational training programme (1993-96) the necessity was mentioned of setting up a national system of qualifications which would serve as a frame of reference for the production system in the elaboration of the catalogue of vocational training titles and the directory of certificates of occupational proficiency, thus making occupational integration more effective through a system of correspondence and validation covering both (titles and certificates) and facilitating access of the adult working population to the education system to acquire vocational requalification.

The new regulation of vocational education and training proposed in this first programme, based on a modular structure of vocational competences, 'will facilitate the validation of competences acquired through work experience' (first vocational training programme).

Thus, work on the elaboration of the catalogue of titles and the directory of certificates of occupational proficiency was undertaken along these lines-we have presented the methodology used in this report-but, without leading to the creation of a national system of qualifications at the end of the programme.

The adoption of the second vocational training programme in February 1998, which will be in force until 2002, has once again revitalized efforts to create and establish the national system of qualifications whose priority objective is to achieve an integrated system of qualifications and vocational training.

The integrated nature of the system entails achievement of the following objectives:

1. Develop the integration of vocational qualifications, by ascertaining the qualification needs of production processes and the specific requirements of autonomous communities and other States of the European Union.
2. Promote the integration of the different forms of acquiring vocational competences.
3. Bring about the integration of vocational training provisions through the development of an integrated modular catalogue of training related to the system of qualifications and a network of training centres which offer the items in this catalogue.

The labour administration realizes that this integrated nature, as a feature of the national system of qualifications (SNC), implies, on the one hand, development of the idea of a lifelong system of vocational training sponsored by the communities, and on the other hand, a permanent interaction between the objectives of qualification and the training provision so as to make available a procedure capable of evaluating and recognizing the different forms of acquiring competences and constructing training provision, and finally, the relevance of collective bargaining as a contact instrument between the national system of qualifications and the reality of the production system (Sánchez, 1998, p. 56).

In this connection, the trade union *Comisiones Obreras* explicitly recognises that 'one factor necessary for the achievement of the integrated system, and even more, for an improvement of the transparency of the labour markets, is the certification of work experience' (Gómez, 1998, p. 26), arguing that the integration of work experience in training paths is an element which will decisively influence lifelong learning. Thus, it is recognised that the national system of qualifications will be 'the main mechanism of institutional and collective regulation which can link the training system (...) with the mechanisms for the regulation and accreditation of work experience whose point of reference should be based on the occupational classification systems derived from collective bargaining revitalized by the inherent dynamics of the national system of qualifications' (Blanco, 1998, p. 46).

In the opinion of *Comisiones Obreras*, establishment of the national system of qualifications will have the advantage of 'destroying the purely company-based reference framework of qualification. The role of companies/employers in the production and reproduction of qualifications is a major constraint on recognition of qualifications outside the company' (1). This requires the creation of mechanisms for the social and institutional recognition of qualification. In other words, the creation of a unified public instrument at State level which takes account of different autonomous areas of action.

2.3.1. Tasks attributed to the national system of qualifications

The system should fulfill the following tasks:

(a) respond to the qualification needs of the production system;

(b) motivate persons to build up their own vocational qualification and improve it by capitalizing competences acquired in one of the three training subsystems and/or through work experience, and thus improve their employment opportunities;

(c) induce employers and trade unions to use collective bargaining as a means of recognizing and validating qualifications which have either been acquired or are in the process of being acquired by workers.

Of these tasks, the most important one is that of motivating persons to develop and enhance their vocational qualifications. That is why it is necessary to respond to the needs of these persons to cope with the requirements of the labour market and with the rapid evolution of occupations as a result of technological change. This means that the broadening of the occupational field inherent in the acquisition of qualifications must be large enough to offer adequate employment opportunities; furthermore, the nature of the competence associated with this field should be such that it includes an aggregate of skills which enable the transfer of knowledge, know-how and attitudes or the ability to deal with different work situations in this field.

2.3.2. The national institute for qualifications

There is a general consensus among members of the general council for vocational training on the necessity and importance of the national institute for qualifications (*Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones* – INC), as a procedure or an instrument capable of assessing and recognizing the different forms of acquiring competences.

In the proposals made by the general council for vocational training on 30 June 1998, it is stated 'the national system of qualifications constitutes and acts as a common frame of reference for all vocational education and training policies and the training provision derived from these policies', which means that a closer look must be taken at the national institute for qualifications. According to the council, the national institute for qualifications has the task of providing effective support for all managers of vocational training. Responding to these proposals in the final version of the draft Royal Decree creating the national institute for qualifications of 21 July 1998, it is stated that its constitution is recognised 'as a specific instrument endowed with capacity, technical efficiency and independence in the selection of criteria, and with links to the general council for vocational training '.

In keeping with the purpose of the national system of qualifications, the priority objectives will be: observation of qualifications and their evolution, ascertainment of qualifications, accreditation of qualifications, development of the integration of vocational qualifications, and follow-up and evaluation of the national vocational training programme. In line with the provisions of the second national vocational training programme and its stated objectives,

various functions to be fulfilled by the national institute for qualifications are identified. Of these functions, the most important are 'proposing the necessary measures for regulation of the system of correspondence, validation and equivalence between the three subsystems **including work experience'**, and that of 'facilitating functional interrelations between training activities of the different vocational training subsystems and the titles and certificates generated by them, and the systems of occupational classification resulting from collective bargaining'.

With respect to its organic and functional structure, it is said that the institute will be headed by a director who will be charged with coordinating and stimulating the work and activities of this institution. It is specified that the director will be appointed through a ministerial order of the government on the basis of a joint proposal made by the Ministries of Education and Labour with advance mandatory notification of the general council for vocational training. Some functional areas directly under the director will be created: occupational observatory, research on methodology and the links with the national system of occupational qualifications and information and management of resources.

The trade unions conceive the institute as an autonomous entity whose highest level of management should reflect the tripartite and balanced composition of the council; under this level there will be a technical directorate and management consisting of top-level officials responsible for the different areas or departments, and also a directorate and subdirectorate directly responsible for overall management and accountable to the highest management level. Participation of the social partners (employers and trade unions) will be broadened to include the subdirectorates and they will also be present in the functional divisions and technical departments.

2.3.2.1. Methodology and process of certification

In the draft decree on the creation of the national institute for qualifications it is stated that its functions will include those of 'establishing a basic methodology to identify occupational competences (...) proposing a system of vocational accreditation and recognition (...) proposing provisions for the accreditation of occupational competences (..) and criteria to be applied in the assessment of competences'. However, there is no indication of which assessment criteria are to be used, or when and how they are to be used.

In general terms, there is a consensus between the social actors and the public administration on the modular structure in the organization of the national system of qualifications, in other words, according to each one of the subsystems of regulated occupational and continuing training. There is also consensus on competence units as the minimum units of knowledge, skills, etc., identifiable in the labour market and in the employment relationship. The correspondence and validation of titles and certificates will be established on the basis of these competence units. Correspondence should not be viewed solely in terms of the equivalence between the competence contents of the training courses in question, it should consider the possibility of training contents which are different but which will lead to the same competence, *'in this case both modules should be examined and if both lead to the same final competence objective, the equivalence should be considered'* (13).

With respect to this envisaged degree of equivalence, the education administration has serious doubts on coincidence with the objectives of competence in the titles and certificates, because little technical stringency was applied when the occupational profiles were derived from the certificates, even though their construction followed the functional analysis of the competence units. Therefore, one of the primary objectives of the national institute for qualifications is to develop a common methodology which will make it possible to maintain the unity of criteria for the heterogeneity to be found in the certificates of occupational proficiency (see paragraph 2.4. in the following).

This situation raises some obstacles for the future institute, which will be further exacerbated if the assessment and recognition of non-formal learning identified with work experience also has to be taken into consideration.

In the opinion of the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations (*Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales* – CEOE) the fact that different access routes exist in the certification of knowledge – i.e. regulated vocational training certified through a title and occupational vocational training, continuing training and work experience certified by certificates – will lead to a loss of confidence in qualifications on the labour market (Parra, 1998). Similarly, from the trade union angle, as qualification cannot be seen as a disaggregated accumulation of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, the establishment of an integrated system of vocational training will prevent 'a return to the dichotomy of evaluating theoretical knowledge and practical skills as two elements dissociated from one another' (García, 1998, p. 87).

The **proposal of the CEOE**, the employers, on the access routes to the certification of knowledge and work experience, suggests a reduction of accreditation routes. On the one side, the acquisition of the certificate of occupational proficiency is divided into two phases: one, successfully completing occupational training courses which lead to obtaining a diploma; two, successful completion of a practical test before a board to obtain a certificate of occupational proficiency. Work experience is integrated in this formula. On the other side, in the case of workers coming from regulated vocational training, it is necessary to arouse their interest in getting the corresponding certificate of occupational proficiency. The conditions laid down for conducting the tests stipulate that the social partners should be represented in the boards and that the tests should contain sufficient quality to offer status and guarantees on the labour market.

The **position of the trade unions**, particularly sensitive to the validation of work experience, is that the assessment capacity of the integrated system should not be confined to the tests, as this would lead to a considerable reduction of the validation of work experience. In this context, the collective bargaining system presents itself as a valid frame of reference for the recognition of qualification acquired in the enterprise.

However, the proliferation of occupational categories derived from the old labour ordinances which continues to persist in some sectors of activity, and the slow development, through collective bargaining, of occupational classification by occupational groups (Law No 11/1994), is recognised as a major constraint on the homogeneity of classification systems. As a result, there are the beginnings of *'a mixed system of recognition: by the social partners (joint sectoral committees) plus some type of test which*

does not necessarily have to be a theoretical or practical test... but where the predominant element is always the accreditation by the social partners of experience gained in the sector' (7).

2.3.3. The Basque institute for qualifications

The Basque country, with competence in the field of vocational education and training, is the autonomous community which has made the greatest progress in integrating vocational qualifications and related vocational training in one single system.

After the adoption and publication of the law on the general regulation of the education system (LOGSE) at central government level, the ways and means of implementing it were examined in the Basque country and, to this end, the Institute for Curricular Development and Teacher Training (*Instituto para el Desarrollo Curricular y la Formación del Profesorado* – IDC) was set up, (Official State Gazette of the Basque Country (*Boletín Oficial del País Vasco* – BOPV) No 140 of 20 July 1992). As a further step, at the end of 1994 the Basque council for vocational training was established (Decree 448/1994) as the institutional and social body responsible for regulated and non-regulated vocational training. On the proposal of the Basque council for vocational training, the government council approved the Basque vocational training plan of 22 April 1997, whose primary and fundamental purpose was to gear training to employment and competitiveness. The plan was approved with the participation of three government departments – justice, economics, labour and social security; education, universities and research; industry, agriculture and fisheries – the representatives of the education centres, the social partners, and economic and trade union circles. The main lines of action proposed were: identification and definition of vocational qualifications in a Basque system of qualifications, establishment of a modular catalogue linked to the development of a system of recognition and accreditation of competences.

The integrated nature of the system of qualifications recognises the importance of its social dimension, i.e., recognition of the various ways through which people acquire competence throughout their professional lives. In the decree setting up the Basque institute for qualifications, it is stated that the system 'can become a path for the recognition and accreditation of vocational qualifications acquired by youth and adults through some training or learning process or through work experience'.

Thus, one of the fundamental objectives of the Basque institute for qualifications – as one of the instruments supporting the Basque system of qualifications – is to set up a system of recognition of competence credits with sufficient flexibility to recognise and certify knowledge and skills acquired in different forms and at different times and places. To this end, it is considered useful to establish a register of vocational achievements which will list the competence units and qualifications of the Basque country attained by individuals, the acquisition procedures and the organizations or centres authorized to issue them. It is believed that with such systems, the social partners and the employment services will have an effective instrument for transparency of the labour market, for planning of human resources and for the elaboration of training programmes. It will also make it possible to

draw up a personal progress plan leading to qualification geared to the most adequate estimates prepared by the vocational guidance services.

Up to now, vocational qualifications in the metalworking sector have been identified and defined and are awaiting the opinion of the Basque council before being submitted to the Basque government for adoption. The structure has, to a great extent, followed the methodology proposed for vocational titles by the Ministry of Education. The assessment specifications for each qualification are also being defined with the aim of establishing the level of competences required by a person to be able to get them accredited.

2.4. The certificates of occupational proficiency: A door leading to the recognition of non-formal learning?

The certificate of occupational proficiency is the most important initiative launched in Spain to validate and certify non-formal learning through recognition of the qualifications obtained in the work process. Set up in the mid-1990s, it accredits 'occupational competences acquired through occupational vocational training and work experience' (Statement of Motives, Royal Decree 787/1995).

The origin of the certificates of occupational proficiency is to be found in the first national vocational training plan and the process of deregulation of the Spanish labour market (Law 10/1994 of 19 May 1994). In the fourth additional provision to this law, a reference is made to the certificate of occupational proficiency as the title intended to recognise qualifications acquired through work contracts for learning and training.

One of the fundamental objectives of the national vocational training plan, elaborated and negotiated by the social partners and approved later by the government, is the introduction of a far-reaching reform of vocational training which will adapt its contents to labour market requirements and the Spanish production system, and which will make it possible to set up a system of correspondence, validation and equivalence between the three subsystems which make up vocational training in Spain: regulated, occupational and continuing vocational training. Also, for the first time, reference is made to the possibility of certifying qualifications acquired through work experience.

The reform of vocational training is based on a common methodology developed by the Ministries of Education and Labour which takes the concept of occupation as the basis for the entire new system of instruction and certification. The education and labour authorities define 'occupation as the aggregate occupational activities pertaining to different jobs with common characteristics, whose tasks are performed with technical standards and related measures and which correspond to the same level of qualification' (Cabezas, 1998a, p.18). The 'occupational activities', in turn, consist of technical competence (knowledge, skills and aptitudes required in this occupation), organizational/participative competence (coordination and organization of activities belonging to the occupation), social competence (responsibility, autonomy, relations with the environment) and methodological competence (problem-solving and procedures to cope with changing tasks).

The responsible authorities (the Ministries of Education and of Labour) start with an analysis of the production system to identify qualifications and competences of the corresponding vocational training titles. In 1993, the Ministry of Education and Culture reformed the curricular plans of regulated vocational training and drew up the catalogue of vocational titles which, at present, contains 135 vocational titles (61 intermediate level and 74 higher level) grouped in 22 occupational families. Subsequently, it will be necessary to reform and accredit the occupational training subsystem.

To achieve this, a little later in 1995, the Ministry of Labour created the certificate of occupational proficiency. The new title recognises the qualification of trainees in occupational training courses and also enables them to get the benefit of training contracts and other measures promoting employment (allowances and subsidies) introduced with the reform of the labour market, and what is most important for the purpose of our study, it enables workers to get their qualifications obtained through work experience and continuing training validated and certified.

The certificates of occupational proficiency are also used to recognise the qualification obtained by workers *with practical experience and training contracts* during this period of these contracts. A change introduced in 1994 in the statute of workers, the 'basic' Spanish law for labour relations, obliges employers to give the 'trainee' a certificate which attests the duration of training and the level of practical training. This certificate from the employer can be validated with any one of the certificates of occupational proficiency issued by the administration.

This method of obtaining the certificate of occupational proficiency could become a very important factor, as can be seen by the fact that in 1997, 81 056 practical training contracts and 156 155 training contracts were signed. In 1998, the number was more or less the same as in the previous year: Between January and June, 36 000 and 85 500 contracts, respectively, were concluded.

The Ministry of Labour pursues the following aims with certificates of occupational proficiency:

(a) identify the characteristic vocational competences of occupations and thus objectify accreditation;

(b) integrate occupational vocational training in a system which will guarantee the acquisition of vocational competences;

(c) increase the minimum training contents of workers;

(d) give certification national validity to improve the transparency and unity of the labour market and mobility of the workforce;

(e) accredit, through their work experience, the qualification of workers who do not have any formal educational title. The directory of certificates of occupational proficiency is the outcome of the process of standardizing and updating the training offered by INEM, and it has become a basic component of the national system of qualifications.

Despite the explicit recognition of work experience as one of the access paths to this title, the weight of the so-called *training path* in the certification process continues to be very important. Thus, for example, when elaborating the directory of certificates of occupational proficiency, the Ministry of Labour took the 541 occupations contained in the occupational training courses offered by the national institute for employment as the basis for this work. The *work experience path* always occupies second place and has not, to date, been further developed.

All **certificates of occupational proficiency** have a standardized content integrated by the following elements:

(a) occupational profile of the occupation consisting of the vocational competences required and the corresponding performance criteria;

(b) reference training framework, consisting of the theoretical/practical contents of the training course required to acquire the knowledge, skills and aptitudes;

(c) the training route made up of the training sequence structure within which knowledge associated with a qualification is organized with an explicit reference to the objectives, total duration of the training course and the material and human resources needed to give this training.

At present the directory consists of 148 certificates of occupational proficiency belonging to 25 occupational families out of a total of 27. The second vocational training plan envisages the certification of at least 300 occupations up to the year 2002. When developing the directory of certificates, priority was given to those occupations for which there was greater training demand, which involved a large number of the working population and were subject to technological change. In parallel, once each one of the certificates of occupational proficiency is elaborated, a system of validation with the catalogue of vocational training titles of the Ministry of Education will be established.

Certificates of occupational proficiency are in an experimental phase. At the moment, there is no possibility of obtaining this type of certificate by any one of the two paths (training or experience). In 1997, 30 courses (16 industrial, six for services, five construction and three in the agricultural sector) for certifiable occupations were carried out in the network of occupational training centres of INEM. For 1998, 139 courses have been planned in the INEM centres and another 50 courses are being organized by collaborating bodies and the autonomous communities.

The experience of last year only refers to the *training path*. From this some conclusions have been drawn which probably imply a change in the methodological criteria underlying the certificates of occupational proficiency. The high drop-out rate in the courses with more than 600 hours of instruction and the difficulties encountered to adapt the centres to material conditions and to carry out practical training required for the certificates, necessitates some change in the methodology used. INEM plans to change the structure of the certificates introducing a system of 'credits' which will document the acquisition of partial competence units. INEM believes that this new system will facilitate the introduction of a modular training system based on work practice paths and shorter courses, the

validation process, the recognition of work experience and the certification of partial knowledge (the worker will not receive the certificate of occupational proficiency but will get a certain number of credits which he can increase and complete by participating in training measures).

The process of establishing the certificates of occupational proficiency is based on the programming of courses which will enable future trainees to acquire the vocational competences they need, and on the elaboration of theoretical/practical tests which will enable trainees in occupational training and workers to validate the qualifications acquired through the *training path* or through the *work experience path*. At present, access to certification through training and/or work experience requires the development of a system of validation and assessment mechanisms.

The certificate of occupational proficiency will be obtained after having passed a theoretical/practical test before an assessment committee. In the *training path*, trainees have to complete all the modules contained in the training itinerary for a certificate before they can gain admission to the tests. In the *work experience path*, which can be accredited and validated and, in some cases, complemented by continuing training courses or other qualifying measures, the worker who wishes to gain admission to an assessment test has to fulfil several access conditions which, up to now, have not yet been defined and still have to be regulated by the Ministry of Labour.

The tests are designed by a group of technical experts from the sector concerned, assisted by an expert in assessment methodology, who examine each one of the competences contained in the profile of an occupation. INEM has an extensive methodology which defines the different sections and the weighting of the persons wishing to take the test, and also the scoring system. The tests consist of two parts: one on knowledge and the other on practical skills. The theoretical test is based on a wide range of items related to the different competences required for the occupation which assess knowledge, understanding, diligence, capacity of analysis, synthesis and to evaluate/form opinions on the basis of explicit and defined criteria. The practical tests evaluate the process of execution and the resulting product.

The assessment committees will be of a provincial and sectoral nature. They will consist of seven members and will be able to count on the support of professional experts for the occupations in the sector concerned – appointed on the proposal of the administration – and employers' and trade union representatives from the corresponding production sector. The tests will be organized through an announcement in the Official State Gazette at least once a year. Certificates of occupational proficiency will be issued by the administration on the basis of the qualifications granted by the assessment committees. The administration (the Ministry of Labour or the autonomous communities to whom competence in this field has been transferred) will be obliged to keep a nominal register by occupation of the certificates issued.

INEM, the organization responsible for the maintenance of the certificates of occupational proficiency, has prepared the methodology to undertake a pilot study, in the course of 1998, which will analyse the assessment procedure. The study is based on a trial run of

the assessment tests with trainees from the occupational training courses and workers who have followed the *work experience path*.

When analysing the process of establishing the certificates of occupational proficiency, it is observed that the administration is more interested in guaranteeing the accreditation of trainees who participate in the occupational vocational training system than in recognizing the qualifications obtained by workers through work experience. Although the legal provision which regulates the certificates of occupational proficiency attaches the same value and recognition to both *paths* (training and work) in practice, little by little, methodological hindrances have emerged (such as prior validation through a system of experience credits) which reduce the experience path to an almost marginal position. The labour authorities have not developed or defined criteria and methodologies required to recognise knowledge and skills (formal and informal) acquired at the workplace. The Ministry of Labour is being very cautious in the establishment of this *path* of certification.

Employers' organizations and trade unions link this initiative with the process of creating the future national institute for qualifications. The social partners agree that it is necessary to draw up one single national catalogue of qualifications and that this should include both the catalogue of vocational titles drawn up by the Ministry of Education and the directory of certificates of occupational proficiency drawn up by the Ministry of Labour. They also feel that the national catalogue of qualifications (*Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones* – CNC) is an adequate framework to establish connections and validation between the three vocational training subsystems (regulated, occupational and continuing training). Opinions begin to diverge when laying down the responsibilities of the administration and the social partners in the process of drawing up the national catalogue of qualifications. The Spanish Confederation of Employers' *Organizations (Confederación de Organizaciones Empresariales* – CEOE) believes that the directory of qualifications and competences should be defined – starting with the methodology used by the Ministry of Education for its own catalogue of titles – exclusively by professional experts associated with the administration. The trade unions, *Comisiones Obreras* (CC.OO.) and the *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT), on the contrary, maintain that the national catalogue of qualifications should be drawn up on the basis of negotiation between the social partners taking as the point of departure the reclassification of jobs which occurred in the course of collective bargaining in some sectors of activity (insurance, construction, chemicals).

Comisiones Obreras argues that the concept of *qualification* should be the key factor for the elaboration of this catalogue. In the opinion of this trade union, the term *competence* is hampering the development of the whole system because, while qualification also covers the collective aspect and is constructed from collective knowledge, competence is rooted in the individual. CC. OO thinks that the national system of qualifications should be based on a mechanism of global and collective regulation (collective bargaining) of the training system and recognition of work experience.

This difference of opinion is also to be found in the process of certification. The views of the social partners diverge when it comes to attributing a fundamental role to the national institute for qualifications in this task. The *Unión General de Trabajadores* thinks that the tests should not be the sole criterion for acquiring certificates as, in its opinion, work experience cannot be reduced to a single test (even if it is of a practical nature). It

proposes a system of assessment totally linked to collective bargaining. The employers, on the other hand, agree with the system of tests and examinations drawn up by the administration (especially the education administration), and they propose reducing the different forms of accreditation in the training system (regulated, occupational and continuing training) and work experience, to one single accreditation which can be obtained by undergoing a test of a practical nature before a board in which the social partners will be represented. The CEOE believes that, in this way, a lack of confidence on the part of the employers in the titles and certificates issued by the Ministry of Labour can be avoided. In the case of the titles obtained through regulated vocational training, the only ones which enjoy prestige and recognition, the proposed test will function as revalidation.

The recognition of work experience is, according to the trade union organizations, the outstanding issue of the certification system. UGT proposes the creation, within the field of the collective agreements, of 'validation councils' for the recognition and certification of knowledge, competences and practical training or work experience of workers. *Comisiones Obreras*, on the other hand, thinks that the criteria for the recognition and certification of work experience should not be set up by technical teams and experts from the administrations behind the backs of the social partners. The latter should participate actively in order to guarantee that the system of qualifications is covered by collective agreements. The trade unions argue that the recognition of qualification acquired in the work place or in the enterprise should, of necessity, be associated with collective bargaining if it is to have any effect on professional careers and advancement of employed workers.

As said earlier, the certificate of occupational proficiency was the most important initiative launched in Spain to recognise non-formal learning acquired from work experience. But it has not yet been fully established. As we have seen in the preceding pages, there is a profound lack of definition precisely of those aspects linked to the recognition of work experience, and this is causing the trade unions to feel a great lack of confidence. The labour authorities have announced a standard which will lay down and regulate access through work experience to the certificates of occupational proficiency but up to now the outlines of this standard have not been drawn up or discussed with the social partners. The development of the so-called *training path*, as we showed above, is receiving much more attention. In 1993, in the whole of Spain, more than 5 300 occupational training courses with an attendance of 106 564 trainees and a total budget of 82 011 048 000 pesetas were organized. In 1996, the latest available figures, the number of trained trainees was 91 657 in a total number of 5 886 courses for which a budget of 142 thousand million pesetas was allocated. The importance of certificates of occupational proficiency will increase greatly if and when employed workers can get their work experience validated and certified. But this is still something which belongs to the future.

2.5. Recognition and validation of non-formal learning in collective bargaining

Recognition and validation of non-formal learning in collective bargaining is directly situated in the concrete context of labour relations.

Attention should be drawn to the reform of the statute of workers through Law 11/1994 of 19 May which has the aim of strengthening the development of collective bargaining as a regulatory element in labour relations and working conditions. In the same text, it is stated that 'areas which up to now were reserved for State regulation will be transferred to the field of collective bargaining ' (id).

This is the intention followed in amending some of the articles on the system of occupational classification. It is stated that the collective agreement or, in its absence, the agreement between the company and the workers' representatives, will deal with the establishment of the system of occupational classification of workers in occupational categories or groups, adding that the occupational group can also include different categories and functions or occupational specialties.

This new occupational classification, according to the trade union leaders interviewed, will help establish a relationship which is more direct and, above all, more homogeneous between the different levels of vocational qualification and training subsystems. This will make it possible to set up a more direct relationship between competence units in vocational training nodules and sectoral vocational qualification structures.

It is argued that occupational classification by occupational groups will make it possible firstly, to do away with the purely company-based reference framework of qualification which limits recognition outside the company, and secondly, to establish methodologies and concrete validation procedures by setting up the national system of qualifications.

At present, several sectors have followed this new formula for occupational classification of their workers: private banking, hotels and restaurants, chemical industry, cosmetics and related products, metalworking, etc. The agreement which acts as the basic reference is in the chemical industry which was the pioneer in this field.

Setting out from a situation common to other sectors because of the multiplicity of provincial, subsector and company agreements, a general agreement (with nationwide scope) was signed in 1978 in the chemical industry with the aim of being the central pivot of labour relations in the sector. In this agreement, the occupational groups were taken as the criterion for occupational classification of the total workforce in the sector.

The classification in occupational groups followed a functional criterion in the sense that what was classified was not 'what the worker supposedly could or would in future be able to do but what he actually did' (Boix, 1998, p. 196). The inclusion of the functions to be developed in different occupational groups, eight plus the group zero of managing staff, was undertaken in line with the combination of different factors including those related to personal and social skills and abilities. These are: knowledge, initiative and autonomy, complexity, responsibility and leadership.

Taking into account the functional reference of occupational groups, knowledge as a classification factor contains both training and experience and is determined by the 'time required by a person with average capacity, and possessing the specific training, to acquire the know-how and practical skills needed to perform the job ' (agreement of the chemical industry 1997/98).

In other agreements such as in the cosmetics and related products sector, occupational groups are classified according to three factors: competence, commitment/initiative and responsibility. In this case, the recognition of informal learning is carried out in a more explicit manner, and competence is understood as the aggregate of knowledge, experience and skill required for the normal performance of the job independent of how this was acquired. In addition to recognition of the different forms of acquisition, competence embodies not only technical know-how and competence, but also leadership skills and competence in human relations which 'implies freedom to act at the level of autonomous decision-making and action inherent in the job in order to achieve successful results' (agreement for the cosmetics and related products sector, 1998/99).

From the trade union angle, the chemical industry, the cosmetics and related products sector and others have set up agreements whose occupational classification structure makes it possible to limit *'the strictly company-oriented reference framework of qualification'* (1), at the same time that foundations are being laid for the establishment of a methodology and concrete procedures for the validation of experience in these sectors. The problem which arises lies firstly, in the fact there is no general criterion for validation of work experience as it has not yet been possible to set up the national system of qualifications, the objective proposed by the first and second vocational training plans. Secondly, the recognition of experience is governed by the unequal position of workers in the division of labour *'... the recognition which is given is very low and limited to a few companies with levels of qualification such as minimum intermediate-high'* (10).

In effect, within the legal framework of these agreements, there is evident acknowledgment of the functional requirements of each occupational group. In the agreement in the chemical sector, training required by occupational groups 1 and 2 comprises knowledge at elementary training level, but for groups 7 and 8 the corresponding level is an intermediate or higher academic title with the addition of extensive work experience.

On the other hand, in the general agreement for cosmetics and related products it is stated that recognition of social skills in not required in occupational groups 1 and 2 because this is a part of 'working together and having normal communication with others ' (id.), but for groups 7 and 8 much emphasis is laid on the capacity of human relations to be able to motivate colleagues. In other words, in the interpretation of the agreements in the chemical sector and the cosmetics and related products sector, recognition which can be given to elements related to informal learning depends on the position occupied by the person in the division of labour process. Less recognition of informal learning in lower positions in the division of labour, and inversely, greater recognition of this type of learning in higher positions.

2.5.1. Recognition of experience in the concrete context of labour relations

Even though there is a formal acknowledgment in the above-mentioned agreements that workers can get accreditation of their knowledge and skills acquired through training or experience (the term used is equivalence), this does not necessarily mean the actual recognition of knowledge and learning acquired through informal mechanisms by workers. This fact has far-reaching repercussions on various situations in the real working world.

For example, in the agreement in the cosmetics and related products sector, it is said that a joint committee will be set up in the enterprise or the centre with the power to issue the corresponding certification for workers recruited through training contracts. However, in practice, the learning contract – the subject of a general strike in 1988 – listed in the statute of workers under training contracts, was, when actually used, considered to be garbage, *'a cheap, low-cost substitute for fixed-duration contracts'* (5), with the result that there was scant recognition of this form of in-company learning.

In the same way, if a craftsman moves to another enterprise or sector, and if there are no validation procedures for non-formal learning, this means that he will not get recognition for the knowledge he has acquired in his professional work *'and in many cases it is as if he has to start all over again'* (5).

Inadequate recognition of knowledge linked to professional experience is to be seen in the restructuring processes introduced by companies in the chemical sector. Through these processes the exit from the labour market of workers with many years of experience has been greatly facilitated by linking this with preretirement plans and retraining and new placement procedures, taking into account that acquired skills and knowledge have been very low, and if at all existent, in many cases this has been managed by workers themselves.

The addition of work organization aspects to the reasons for which employers may take the initiative to terminate contracts in Law 11/1994 on the reform of the statute of workers, as the first factor; company policies stressing 'flexibility' of contracts, working time and work rhythms, as the second; and trade union action targeted, to a great extent, to obtaining the highest possible compensation through bargaining, as the third, have had the outcome that the professional knowledge and skill of *'highly qualified workers with much experience and the capacity of improvisation and exploration'* (5) has been condemned to degradation and the dead end of redundancy.

This does not prevent some enterprises – despite redundancy – from venturing into new contracts with young workers with better training, more personal flexibility, capacity to adapt to different work rhythms and rotating work schedules, prepared to work on weekends, etc., and they propose training schemes for these young people with the aim of binding them closer to the work they are going to do. In other words, access to training resulting from restructuring processes in the enterprise, is used *'not to deal with the surplus but as an alternative'* (6).

2.5.2. Construction: sectoral features

The construction sector has about one million workers in employment of whom approximately 80% are on-site workers while the rest are technicians and administrative staff.

The artisanship and professionalism of workers has mainly been developed at the workplace, while working on the site, which means that workers in the construction sector who have started their careers as apprentices or unskilled workers have pursued a process of professional mobility based on work experience until they reached the occupational categories of the trade. In this context, construction workers have a great lack of regulated vocational training. To this one may add the scarce provision of this type of training – there are only seven modules altogether of which four are level 2 and three are level 3, – and the low level of demand throughout the State – of the 700 trainees who start the course, only 100 or 200 trainees manage to get through all training levels.

On the other hand, this is a sector in which workers sometimes have to face high unemployment levels, with a high rotation between companies and a great deal of concealed or illegal work.

The outcome is that few young persons are integrated in the sectoral market, workers are subjected to repeated probation periods each time they sign a new contract, and numerous workers leave this sector to seek employment in other sectors of activity.

Against this background, collective bargaining was characterized by territorial decentralization and consisted of 52 provincial collective agreements up to 1992. In this year a significant centralizing process was initiated when the general agreement which covered collective bargaining as a whole was signed.

2.5.2.1. The Workers Foundation for Construction (Fundación Laboral de la Construcción – FLC)

With the conclusion of the 1992 general agreement, trade unions and employers' organizations took the joint decision to set up the Workers Foundation for Construction which had the aim of *'setting up an internal system for the construction sector which would recognise and certify'* (8) all types of learning acquired by workers. This organization, with joint membership, was created with the objectives of improving the working conditions and occupational health of all workers, of managing all matters related to vocational training, and issuing a professional skills card, valid for the whole sector, containing the entire occupational and training history of workers.

The work of the foundation is basically directed at the development of different training areas, occupational training with funding from INEM and the autonomous communities, continuing training funded by the foundation for continuing training and, to a lesser extent, regulated vocational training, especially the social guarantee programmes.

With respect to training, the foundation has worked on the correspondence of occupational training modules and regulated training modules and on some equivalence with continuing training modules. The result of the correspondence between the three

types of training is a continuing training catalogue containing some 300 subjects listed as submodules of regulated training.

2.5.2.1.1. Recognition of certification

The regulated training titles are the most widely recognised references in the construction sector. This is partly because the continuing training certificates issued by the body which provides the training are not of much value on the labour market (even though they are issued by the foundation itself) and the occupational training certificates, also issued by the body which provides the training, have not yet achieved the degree of official recognition comparable to the certificates of occupational proficiency awarded by the national institute for employment, mainly because the corresponding tests for their validation have not yet been introduced (Galván, 1998).

The real and actual recognition of learning acquired from work experience is obtained through the recognition mechanisms of employers, *'nowadays, it is the enterprise which fixes the category'* (2) and, in more specific terms, through the decision taken by the foreman in charge of the work. The procedure most widely used for this recognition is a probation period when starting a new job in a different enterprise, a very common feature in this sector. This probation period is sometimes much longer than usual with a level of professionality below the category achieved by the worker.

The FLC is also responsible for the issue and follow-up of a professional skills card recording not only the occupational category of the worker but also his periods of employment in different enterprises. This skills card is one way of validating work experience and recognizing the professional proficiency of workers who have not attended a training centre, a situation which, in this sector, applies to the majority of the workforce.

2.5.2.1.2. The professional skills card

In view of the precarious employment conditions affecting workers in the exercise of their occupation, 'they spend half of the period of their contract in a state of probation ... because they cannot show more than their tools as proof that they are able to do the work ...' (2), the professional skills card will have the advantage of releasing the worker from the probation period for tasks falling within his occupational category; it will also extend the effects of the probation period to the whole sector, go beyond the confines of the individual enterprise. Under these conditions the skills card will not only be a means of accrediting the professional skills of the worker but will also, fundamentally, imply the standardization of some of the uncertain conditions affecting the majority of workers.

To obtain the professional skills card, the worker has to present documentary proof that he was on the payroll of the enterprises in which he worked; this document records the period of time he worked and the occupational category in which he was classified. In case he is unable to present this documentary proof, the unemployment card which specifies the category and the specific area of work can also be accepted.

Procedures for the issue of this professional skills card are carried out in trade union organizations or in the offices of the 17 collaborating centres of the FLC at national level.

In actual fact, however, despite the agreements and the necessity of having a professional skills card, very few have been issued to date, only a few hundred. Furthermore, it was necessary to adjust the procedures required to obtain this card *'.. in order to prevent the process from becoming too cumbersome'*(8). At present, in view of the precarious conditions affecting employment in this sector and the large number of enterprises which a worker can eventually traverse, the possibility of simplifying the procedure is being examined *'.. because sometimes it is quite a nuisance getting these documents from the enterprises'* (8).

2.5.3. The recognition of non-formal learning in restructuring processes (the case of Altos Hornos de Vizcaya)

Altos Hornos de Vizcaya (AHV – Biscay Blast Furnaces) was a company in the steel sector, the predominant source of employment in Biscay with more than 12 000 workers in 1980. Since then, as a result of forceful restructuring processes, it has become part of the Aceralia group (together with Laminaciones de Lesaka, Bandas de Chavarri, Acería Compacta Bizcaia, etc.) following a corporate policy of mergers and concentration and the outsourcing of production. This restructuring process affected 5 800 workers in 1993 for whom it implied a rupture in their social and working lives, a break with a tradition of work which had extended over several generations.

As part of the restructuring process, a monitoring committee was set up by trade unions and the company with the aim of finding different solutions for the workers who would become redundant. The services of agencies dealing with the relocation of workers were contracted. This relocation process consisted of the following steps: firstly, a selection of workers through tests to ascertain their aptitudes and knowledge/skills taking into consideration both their vocational titles and their work experience; secondly, a probation period of three to six months in the enterprise in which they were going to work; and thirdly, some complementary training, in some cases, during the probation period.

In addition, an office for the promotion of economic activity was also set up with the participation of central government, with the aim of inducing enterprises to settle in that area by offering them financial aids and subsidies.

2.5.3.1. The management of redundant workers

Basically, two methods were followed to deal with the 5 800 workers who became redundant as a result of the industrial restructuring processes. The first method was preretirement for all workers who, in the year 2001, would reach the age of 52, applying different mechanisms of unemployment allowance and subsidies until they reached retirement at the age of 65. This covered 3 250 workers.

The second line of action was that of retraining workers through additional specific training which, in some cases, was accompanied by geographical mobility. Over 1 000 workers were involved in this measure; they were relocated in other companies belonging to the group or in enterprises in other sectors of activity.

Within the companies of the group the relocation of the workers proceeded with some difficulties. Acería Compacta de Bizcaia (ACB – Compact Steelmills of Biscay) is a company in the group which is planning to work with a new system of technology and has a staff of 300 workers of whom 50 will be higher-level technicians. Following a decision of the management of Altos Hornos de Vizcaya, these 50 higher-level technicians were to be recruited directly to the ACB staff, *'as usual there is a certain amount of paternalism and those strictly following the instructions of the management are the first to be relocated'*(9). For the remaining 250 jobs a selection was made from the 1 500 workers with vocational titles or work-based skills. Before this selection process, workers were given six months of training in new technologies in the fields of electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, quality assurance and information processing; there were also some additional measures such as a visit to compact steelmills in Mexico, France and Guipuzcoa, which are similar to the ones being set up by ACB. This was training without any accredited recognition as it concerned training for adaptation to new systems.

There were some other relocation options within the companies of the group arising from the establishment in Sagunto of a new electroplating plant belonging to Aceralia and Acerinox (French capital). However, the demand for occupational profiles equivalent to second-level vocational training certificates and, above all, knowledge of French, *'when are they going to realize what they were doing before'* (9), made it difficult to carry out relocation.

Another approach was to seek alternative jobs or relocations in other enterprises in the area. Using the continuing training facilities provided by the Foundation for Continuing Training or the Basque Foundation for Training, training measures were introduced to retrain workers for other sectors of vocational skills. For example, workers who had undergone second-level vocational training in electrical and mechanical engineering, were given one-year courses in drop forging and electronics with the aim of relocating them in companies belonging to other sectors such as the automobile industry or the white household appliances industry. About 130 workers were relocated in other companies in the area. In other cases, for example, the mechanical fitters who were given training in drop forging, were not recruited by Volkswagen because *'they take youngsters who have the same preparation and give them a training contract'*(9).

The working conditions, especially wages and salaries, in Altos Hornos de Vizcaya (AHV) as part of the steel sector, the life of the workers, the traditions of social and working life through several generations, are some of the causes of difficulties which make workers resist retraining for other activities in other companies in the area. For example, trade unions have negotiated payment of compensatory allowances with the management of the company; they will be paid for five years to compensate the salary losses suffered by workers who have been relocated to small enterprises in the area.

This relocation approach also includes workers who have lost their jobs through the outsourcing of some services or sections such as the information processing department. This department in Altos Hornos de Vizcaya carried out computerization work for Laminaciones de Lesaka, for Bandas de Chavarri and for ACB, all of which belong to the Aceralia group. After the industrial conversion process was initiated by the Aceralia group and Altos Hornos disappeared, one of the targets of the management of the group was to

have outsourcing agreements with specialized computer firms such as Indra or IBM. Through this, the informatics department of AHV, consisting of 42 workers, will be integrated in one of these companies after workers have received training to adapt themselves to the systems of the company concerned.

After relocating the persons who became redundant through industrial conversion, some 550 workers are left, most of whom present serious problems when it comes to their new employment. These are mostly workers for whom the following factors converge: they have an average age of 40 to 48, they belong to a category of unskilled labour with some specialized skills which make it difficult to retrain them – even more so when training offered to them requires some basic knowledge or know-how: in addition, some of them suffer from the effects of industrial accidents or have some disabilities which makes it extremely difficult to put them in new jobs

Summing up, with regard to the experience gained from the industrial conversion and restructuring processes in the chemical and steel sectors, one may agree with the views of a trade union expert who said *'the recognition of the learning acquired by workers in the course of their working life has been practically nil. Indeed, the remedies which have been attempted were always based on the criterion that they are persons who have entered a state of professional obsolescence'* (1). If, to all these conditions, we add the fact that *'... in this country there is no mechanism for the recognition of the experience which can complement vocational training certificates ...'* (id.), it is becoming eminently evident that a national system of qualifications and appropriate instruments to operate it, are crucial for the regularization of the working and living conditions of workers.

3. EVALUATION AND EXPERIENCES OF SYSTEMS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR THE RECOGNITION OF NON-FORMAL LEARNING IN SPAIN

A first overview of the results of the methods applied for the recognition and validation of informal learning in Spain shows that the criteria applied to identify and recognise this learning has been expanded.

After the introduction of integrated services plans for employment (SIPE), active employment policies now include new aspects of occupational integration. The job interview, the portfolio of vocational qualification, the compilation of biodata on training and job experience, the self-assessment questionnaire, technical guidance and support, etc., all encompass a series of actions and programmes which implicitly recognise the role of non-formal qualifications and learning in occupational integration. But there are no explicit means of recognizing the qualifications obtained through these different actions, nor do they lead to accreditation.

The same applies to the personal skills card of workers in the construction sector. Through the agreement between trade unions and the employers' association in this sector, the national confederation for *construction (Confederación Nacional de la Construcción* – CNC), presentation by the worker of documentary proof from the companies in which he has worked with a statement of the occupational category, is enough for recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired through work experience.

Experience gained from collective bargaining shows that qualifications can be built up through recognition of occupational categories, although this does not go beyond enterprise level, even with changes in the system of occupational classification by functional groups currently being introduced in many sectors of activity.

However, the main difficulty in extending the criteria, as the above-mentioned situations by unemployed persons show, is that of recognition. By seeking training and professional activities through a combination of different techniques, unemployed persons can assert themselves as individuals *vis-à-vis* employers without, however, having any legitimacy which can act as a guarantee. To a certain extent, the same applies to workers who have acquired their qualification through work-based learning. The move of these workers to other companies or sectors means they have to start anew. Reality means that the results of the socio-productive changes resulting from industrial conversion and restructuring are the expulsion of numerous groups of workers and the obsolescence and marginalization of much specialized knowledge and skills and individual and collective trades.

On the other hand, we can see that the door to recognition and validation of work-based skills is being opened through certificates of occupational proficiency (occupational training, continuing training and work experience) and vocational titles (regulated vocational training). Participation of the social partners and administrations in the reform processes in regulated vocational training, agreements on continuing training and in the

training and occupational integration plan (FIP), implies that these products (certificates and titles) will offer a broad range of legitimacy for the validation of work-based knowledge and skills. But, how can this be formalized? What formula can be applied to recognise and validate work experience?

Even if, as indicated in Chapter 2, conditions of access are not clearly defined in the certificates and titles, it is seen that the objective theoretical-practical test is the method par excellence. The assessment committees whose members come from vocational training staff and experts from the area of activity concerned, have powerful methodological instruments which measure and weight the different areas of competence into which qualifications have been divided, and it is their task to certify knowledge and skills derived from work experience.

The predomination of the training route, the weak development of the experimental route, and the objective criteria for recognition tests in both types of products, present problems which have to be viewed in the context of the validity of the applied criteria.

In what terms will the integration of work experience take place in the national system of qualifications, the system which has been proclaimed as the objective of the second national vocational training programme (PNFP)?

In the explicit formalization to be found in the second programme, the national system of qualifications is presented as a system which integrates different vocational training subsystems: regulated, occupational and continuing training including knowledge and skills acquired through work experience. The specific instrument designed to facilitate this process of integration is the future institute for qualifications proposed by the general council for vocational training and submitted to the government for approval. Given the basis of a modular structure of training linked by competence units, it is the task of the institute to propose a system of accreditation and professional recognition of acquired knowledge and skills.

The greater the integration of work-based knowledge and skills in the national system of qualifications (SNC), the greater the dilemma of finding criteria and methods which are adequate for their recognition and validation. In addition to the documentary evidence – especially titles and certificates – considered in various documents as the antecedents to be taken into consideration for the future institute for qualifications, the solutions which are proposed are situated in the context of dialogue between the social partners.

In general terms, the discussions of the social partners represented in the general council for vocational training may be subdivided into the following three points:

(a) agreement between the employers' associations and trade union organizations to demand the participation of the social partners in the design and later development of a flexible and integrated training system;

(b) the reference points to be fixed for the inclusion of qualifications in the national system of qualifications (SNC). The employers' associations feel that these should be defined by experts on the basis of the catalogue of titles drawn up by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), whereas the trade unions think that the reference base should be the reclassification of jobs through collective bargaining;

(c) with respect to the validation criteria for work experience in the national system of qualifications (SNC), the employers' associations tend to favour the single test before a board in which objective criteria and technical contents play a leading role. This will guarantee the quality of these qualifications and thus avoid confusion and lack of orientation on the labour market *vis-à-vis* the qualifications guaranteed by the institute for qualifications. In this context it is not considered desirable to have the social partners participate in the execution of these tests. Thus, while accepting the functional relationship between the system of qualifications and occupational classification produced through collective bargaining, they reject the automatic relationship which could be established between the two systems. For the trade unions, on the other hand, the reference base is situated in the concrete context of labour relations whose framework is that of collective bargaining. They do not reject the test as the criterion of validation, but see it as a method subject to accreditation by the social partners (joint committees). In other words: 'the examination or the passing grade is the fact of being on the payroll each month, not the marks given by the examiner in an artificial laboratory situation' (1).

In the opinion of the trade unions the test is considered necessary, not to demonstrate the technical knowledge of the person concerned but to demonstrate the willingness and ability to work in a team, '...see how you are going to fit into the group or the enterprise which you are going to join...' (2). In the last resort, given the concrete employment context, which includes the social relationship inherent in the qualification, it is argued that '... not every recognizable skill is a measurable skill...' (11).

Given these two positions, one which advocates simplification and standardization of validation criteria for experience to get transparency of the markets, and one which is based on the legitimacy of collective bargaining between the partners, what does research have to say about this?

The introduction of the recognition and validation of work-based knowledge and skills is a recent subject which has led to the organization of discussions and participation in ongoing European programmes. In this context, we cannot really say that we have a surfeit of research in Spain.

However, research ventures in training, and in more specific terms, research on continuing training needs, which normally means the training of workers in employment, has opened paths leading to research on learning and job skills. There are two approaches here.

Firstly, the studies examining training needs arising from 'the desire to adapt the training of workers in the sector to trends arising from changes in the labour market,' (Fundación Confemetal, 1997, p. 6). Following a method based on a breakdown of companies in the metal sector by large statistical groups - autonomous community, branch of activity and size of company staff, 'training needs are clearly identified by the direction followed by the company and later, at quite a distance, by the different departments of the company. The consultants and representatives of the company workers are the ones with the least responsibility in this field'. (ibid., p. 18). From the indications in this research, the need for

discretion could influence the detection of the training needs of workers, and then there are difficulties in getting to contemplate and recognise knowledge and non-formal learning.

In other research work the introduction of the 'design of systems and methods for the detection of continuing training needs in large companies' (Castillo et al., 1996) can contribute to an increase in the workers' knowledge of the work process with the aim of enabling greater participation in training-related issues in the enterprise. The final goal of this work is that training and, more specifically continuing training, should be the subject of collective bargaining in companies.

The methodological approach is a two-way process. On the one hand, an examination of work organization in the company and in the sector to which it belongs and analysing the company management options, is considered to be the preliminary stage for an analysis of existing qualifications and, above all, those which could emerge in the future. In other words, qualification and training can only be studied within and as a result of a specific division of labour.

On the other hand, the return path is to be found in the concrete work process of the company: to move from actual persons, with jobs and all procedures which make up a specific activity in an 'office or 'workshop', towards their integration in the production unit, the company and the sector to get a feeling for expectations and the training needs of the future.

The synthesis expressed in this second methodological approach, expressed in the questions: who am I, who are we, how many are we, what am I, what are we, implies a recognition of the use of acquired knowledge and skills by workers, acquired both within and outside work experience and labour relations – in many cases not recognised as such by companies – which, in situations of change and reorganization of production, open new options for the training and qualification of workers.

4. CONCLUSIONS

1. In Spain, non-formal learning, usually defined as the knowledge, competences and skills acquired through work experience, **is not accepted through any social or institutional approach** as a form of qualification. This does not mean to say there is no recognition of this knowledge and competence acquired through work experience.

2. In Spain, for the past 10 years or so, with the participation of the social partners and the government, **vocational education and training has been undergoing a process of reform and transformation** (LOGSE, first and second national vocational training programme – PNFP) whose objective is to integrate the different subsystems of training and forms of acquisition of knowledge and skills, i.e. regulated, occupational and continuing training and work experience, in a national system of qualifications with the aim of gearing 'training activities to the qualification needs of the production processes and the labour market (II PNFP, p. 17).

3. The process of integrating different vocational training subsystems and changes in the occupational classification systems in collective agreements which try to establish interrelations between these systems, are – with the participation of the social partners and administrations – leading to an institutionalization process where the knowledge, competences and skills acquired through work experience will be able to obtain recognition. The government is in the process of approving the national institute for qualifications as a support instrument for the national system of qualifications.

4. The recognition of work experience does exist, but it is exclusively confined to the level of the enterprise, which means that integration of work-based knowledge in the construction of qualifications – identified as occupational categories in the context of concrete job relations – is a process whose predominant component is in the enterprise. It is an expression of ***'the importance of employers/enterprises in the production and reproduction of qualifications'*** (1) and consequently, of unequal positions in the division of labour in the process of constructing qualifications.

5. The restructuring and industrial conversion processes which open the possibility of cooperation between companies, new forms of human resource management, more recognition of social skills, career paths which include both the work situation (doing different jobs) and unemployment, a substantial increase of the regulated training contents of the population, mainly youth, together with a considerable increase of the experience of the adult working population and their intermittent occupational and continuing training, are all elements of the current situation which reinforces a trend towards the legitimate recognition of non-formal learning. The path being followed in this process is that of collective bargaining.

6. Collective bargaining has undergone a series of changes within a long and complicated process which started, in legal terms, with the publication of the statute of workers in 1980 and was later reinforced by Law No 11/1994 of 19 March 1994. Pursuing the principles of improvement of the competitiveness of enterprises and protection and promotion of employment, these reforms had the aim of making collective bargaining an instrument of adaptation to changing situations in sectors and

enterprises, and of enabling flexible management of human resources. **Thus, collective bargaining became the principal instrument for the regulation of occupational classification system** which, in the past few years, is changing classification from the occupational categories of the old labour ordinances to functional occupational groups which will encourage the mobility of workers more than the rigidity of the former classification. However, 'flexibility' policies, directed mainly towards contracting procedures, the high levels of unemployment and profound restructuring measures in sectors and enterprises, have affected these processes towards change and mobility through collective bargaining.

7. In which direction will recognition of work-based learning move?

7a) As far as actual facts are concerned, experiences showing an inclination to develop criteria and methodologies for the recognition of learning acquired from work experience have been found. This may be seen in different initiatives of the labour administration which have tried to facilitate job integration of unemployed persons, especially integrated services plans for employment (SIPE)(2.2.2). There are signs of a similar extension of criteria for the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired through work experience in certificates of occupational proficiency corresponding to occupational training (2.4.) and, to a lesser extent, in occupational titles, through training in work centres, the social guarantee programmes and admission tests (2.2.). In the area of collective bargaining at sectoral level, recognition of work experience has been included through the activities of the workers foundation for construction and the corresponding accreditation through the professional skills card (2.5.2.1).

The open questions pertaining to the future which still remain, concern the legitimacy of learning through work experience when these approaches are used, and also the reliability and validity of methodologies used for its recognition and validation. If the approaches which have been analysed are taken as an indication, the options which emerge are quite limited.

Firstly, the options with the greatest degree of legitimacy are the titles and occupational certificates, although the latter have not yet been definitively established. All other approaches do not have legitimacy, as in the case of the integrated services plans for employment, or are exclusively limited to a sector such as the professional skills card in the construction sector.

Secondly, the approaches with more legitimacy for the recognition of work experience have set up mechanisms for validation which basically consist of tests in which training components predominate. On the other hand, the approaches with little or no legitimacy are specifically based on predominantly subjective criteria and on the concrete conditions and contexts of the workplace, thus opening the door to the concept of the social construction of knowledge.

7b) With respect to the **positions and orientations of the social partners**, substantial differences may be observed. The employers' organizations, CEOE-CEPYME, think that the methodologies for recognition and validation of knowledge and skills acquired through work experience should be based on objective criteria – in more specific terms, on the directory of qualifications and competences which uses the methodology of the Ministry of Education and Culture – assessment systems based on tests and/or examinations, and on the assistance of a group of experts connected with the Education administration.

The trade unions, Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.) and the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), on the other hand, believe that the methodologies for the elaboration of the national catalogue of qualifications should be based on negotiation between the social partners taking as the point of departure the reclassification of jobs which occurred in the course of collective bargaining, with assessment systems which are more closely associated with qualitative criteria situated in concrete job relations where the social partners have the opportunity of participating in the accreditation.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACB	Acería Compacta Bizcaia (Compact Steelmills of Biscay)
AES	Acuerdo Económico y Social Economic and Social Agreement
AHV	Altos Hornos de Vizcaya (Biscay Blast Furnaces)
ANFC	Acuerdo Nacional de Formación Continua National Agreement on Continuing Training
BOE	Boletín Oficial del Estado Official State Gazette
BOPV	Boletín Oficial del Pais Vasco Official Gazette of the Basque Country
CCOO	Comisiones Obreras Workers Trade Union
CNC	Catálogo Nacional de Cualificaciones National Catalogue of Qualifications
CEOE	Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations
CEPYME	Confederación Española de la Pequeña y Mediana Empresa Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

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CIG	Confederación Intersindical Gallega Galician Trade Union Confederation
CIREM	Centro de Iniciativas Europeas en el Mediterraneo Centre for European Initiatives in the Mediterranean
DAPO	Desarrollo de Aspectos Personales para la Ocupación Development of Personal Traits for Employment
FIP	Plan de Formación e Inserción Profesional Vocational Training and Occupational Integration Plan
FLC	Fundación Laboral de la Construcción Workers Foundation for Construction
FORCEM	Fundación para la Formación Continua Foundation for Continuing Training
FOREM	Fundación Formación y Empleo Training and Employment Foundation
IDC	Instituto del Desarrollo Curricular y la Formación del Profesorado Institute for Curriculum Development and Teacher Training
IMADE	Instituto Madrileño de Desarrollo Madrid Development Institute
IMAF	Instituto Madrileño para la Formación Madrid Training Institute
INC	Instituto Nacional de las Cualificaciones National institute for qualifications

INEM	Instituto Nacional de Empleo National Institute for Employment
IVC	Instituto Vasco de las Cualificaciones Basque Institute for Qualifications
LOGSE	Ley Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo Law on the General Regulation of the Education System
MAFOREN	Fundación Madrid Formación y Empleo Madrid Training and Employment Foundation
MEC	Ministerio de Educación y Cultura Ministry of Education and Culture
MTSS	Ministerio de Trabajo y Servicios Sociales Ministry of Labour and Social Services
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PNPF	Programa Nacional de Formación Profesional National Vocational Training Programme
RD	Real Decreto Royal Decree
SECOT	Senior para la Cooperación Técnica Senior Citizens for Technical Cooperation
SIPE	Planes de Servicios Integrados de Empleo Integrated Services Plans for Employment

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SPRI	Sociedad para la Promoción y la Reconversión Industrial Society for Industrial Promotion and Conversion
SNC	Sistema Nacional de las Cualificaciones National system of qualifications
UICP	Unidad Interministerial de Cualificaciones Profesionales Interministerial Unit for Vocational Qualifications
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores General Workers Union

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MAGAZINE	period consulted
* boletín del Circulo de Empresarios	1995-98
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* Formation et emploi	1992-97
* Vocational Training	1991-98
* Herramientas	1992-98
* Situación	1995-98
* sociología del Trabajo	various
* Sociologie du Travail	various

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Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Spain

Juan José Castillo
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Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning in Spain

This report is the Spanish contribution to CEDEFOP's project on 'Identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning,' which was initiated in 1997. In the three years since its inception, studies in this field have been conducted in a majority of Member States of the European Union (EU) as well as the European Economic Area (EEA), with only Luxembourg and Iceland not yet included. The objectives of the project are:

- to identify to what degree methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning have been introduced in the respective country;
- to identify how methodologies for the identification, assessment and recognition of non-formal learning are integrated into and supported by existing institutions and systems; and,
- to analyse the political context surrounding the introduction of methodologies and systems.

Spain is one of four Mediterranean countries covered in the project and the report gives a comprehensive overview of developments as well as reactions from the different players involved in Spanish initiatives in the field. Informal and non-formal vocational learning has traditionally been of great importance in Spain. The current report gives a good picture of the efforts to 'tap' this partly invisible and unrecognised reservoir of competences.

Juan José Castillo, Andrés Alas-Pumariño, Maximiano Santos

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